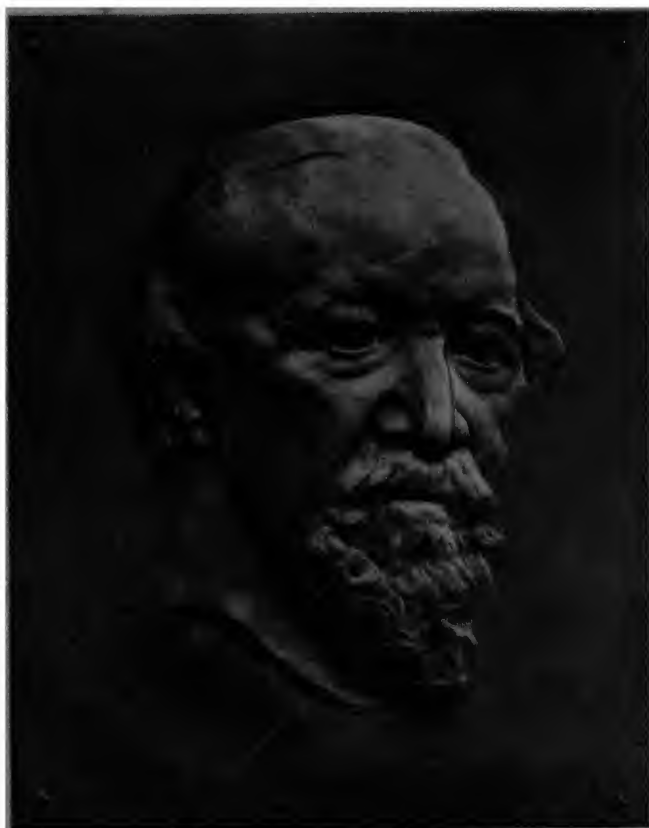


ROBERT BROWNING'S WORKS

CENTENARY EDITION

IN TEN VOLUMES

VOLUME VIII



Robert Browning
(aged 76)

*From the bronze medallion by Gustav. Natorp, 1888.
in the possession of Reginald J. Smith Esq., R.C.*

THE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
SIR F. G. KENYON, K.C.B., D.LITT..

VOLUME VIII — ARISTOPHANES'
APOLOGY — THE INN ALBUM —
THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS

LONDON: SMITH, ELDER & CO.
15 WATERLOO PLACE. MCMXII

**Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO.
At the Ballantyne Press, Edinburgh**

INTRODUCTION

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

DURING his summer holiday of 1872, while he was still collecting and meditating on the material for *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, Browning was reading Aeschylus. In the early summer of 1873, when the Norman tragedy was off his hands, he was translating the *Hercules Furens* of Euripides ; and during the holiday of 1874, which he and Miss Browning spent at Mers, near Tréport, in company with Miss Egerton Smith, he was engaged in incorporating this translation in that "last adventure of Balaustion," to which he gave the name of *Aristophanes' Apology*. During the two months that were spent at Mers, he was working at it strenuously, with the renewed energy which the change from the London season to the little seaside places of France always gave him ; and early in 1875 this, his longest poem with the exception of *Sordello* and *The Ring and the Book*, was published.

The scheme of the poem connects it with *Balaustion's Adventure*, and, like it, it contains a translation of one of the dramas of Euripides ; but whereas in the earlier work the main object

INTRODUCTION

was the translation, with which the comparatively slight setting was inextricably interwoven, in *Aristophanes' Apology* the main interest is in the setting, and the translation might be detached, or "taken as read," without affecting the main theme. The real subject is the discussion of the merits of Euripides, which is supposed to take place between Balaustion and Aristophanes on the evening of the day when the latter had won the prize for comedy with his *Thesmophoriazusae*, and when the news had come of the death of Euripides in far-away Thrace. This discussion is complete in itself; the translation of the *Hercules* is only introduced by way of illustration of Balaustion's triumphant advocacy of her beloved poet. It is a fine translation of a fine—though by no means perfect—play; but its interest is eclipsed by Browning's own poem.

For the general public, *Aristophanes' Apology* labours under the difficulty that it abounds with allusions which require a considerable knowledge of Greek literature and history. Browning did not underrate the amount of information demanded of the reader when he told Dr. Furnivall (Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, 1st series, ii. 4) that "the allusions require a knowledge of the Scholia, besides acquaintance with the 'Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta,'—Athenaeus, Alciphron, and so forth, not forgotten." Browning was not a classical scholar in the technical or professional sense of the term, but he had read much and discursively, and he absorbed what he read so

INTRODUCTION

thoroughly that, although he wrote at a distance from his books, the poem abounds in references which it needs no little learning to recognise and trace. Without a general acquaintance with Greek literature, the main points at issue, and the intensity of feeling aroused by them, cannot be appreciated; and without the special knowledge thus postulated many of the phrases and allusions are unintelligible. For Browning's fame and the reputation of the poem this is unfortunate; for *Aristophanes' Apology* deserves to rank very high in respect both of intellectual force and of sheer poetry. To the lovers of Greek literature it is a classical presentation of one of its everlasting problems, a problem which will never be solved nor lose its attractions so long as Greek poetry is read. It is a problem of conflicting tastes, of different ideals and aims, a clash, not of good with evil, but of good with good: and it is presented by Browning with extraordinary dramatic power, with wonderful sympathy towards both sides, and with great and varied beauty of expression. The poem abounds with beauties,—the wonderful description of the fall of Athens, with which it opens, the news of the death of Euripides, the apparition of Aristophanes, "tolerably drunk" after the celebration of his victory, the vision of the "old pale-swathed majesty" of Sophocles, the lay of Thamuris, the dignified conclusion; and the human interest, the bearing of literature upon life and character, dominates the whole, without the least taint of

INTRODUCTION

didacticism. It is a drama of contending forces, set forth with admirable vivacity and with a whiter heat of inspiration than perhaps any of the other poems after 1870. It is a striking proof of Browning's power of throwing himself into the cause which, for the moment, he represents, that many will feel that the case for Aristophanes is stated with more effect than the case for Euripides, although the poet's own sympathies are with the latter.

THE INN ALBUM

Aristophanes' Apology was published in May, 1875; and, by the end of July, Domett was able to record in his diary that Browning had finished nine-tenths of a new poem already (Hall Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 257). The whole poem only occupied two months in composition. During the summer holiday, spent this year at Villers, on the coast of Normandy, the proofs were corrected; and in November, only six months after the publication of his previous volume, *The Inn Album* appeared. It is again a study of a tragedy, and of a tragedy in real and recent life. Domett records that Browning had originally intended to write it in regular dramatic form, but on hearing that Tennyson was engaged on a tragedy, he abandoned the idea and cast his poem into the form of dialogue strung together on a thread of narrative.

There appears to be no evidence to show what

INTRODUCTION

attracted Browning's attention to the subject of this poem. The events on which it was based were not of quite new occurrence. They formed an episode in the career, more notorious than reputable, of Henry William, Lord de Ros, who died in 1839, and Browning told Domett that he had heard the story "thirty odd years ago." The story was not a pleasant one: an old gambler sets out to fleece an inexperienced but wealthy youth, but by the perversity of luck is himself shorn: and he proposes to liquidate his debt by handing over to the youth a lady whom he has himself seduced. In the original story the youth assents, but the lady, on the scheme being broached to her, committed suicide. Browning takes only the general outline of the actual occurrences, and raises the story to a higher plane of dramatic interest and moral value; and the result is a poem which, though it cannot be pleasant, is certainly impressive, and in which the reader's interest is retained right up to the dramatic catastrophe with which it concludes. It has not the grandeur or the poetry or the wide enduring interest of *Aristophanes' Apology*; but in the circumstances of its production it is a remarkable *tour de force*, and a wonderful proof of the vigour and versatility of its author's genius at the age of sixty-three.

INTRODUCTION

THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS

In strict chronological order of publication, the *Agamemnon* should follow *Pacchiarotto* ; in logical order of evolution it should be placed next to *Aristophanes' Apology*, to which its origin was due. After the publication of the latter, Thomas Carlyle, for whom Browning had the greatest admiration and affection, told him that he ought to translate all the Greek tragedians ; and although Browning did not take up the task immediately (his next volume being *The Inn Album*, and that being followed by *Pacchiarotto*), he did eventually (and perhaps concurrently with these) undertake so much of it as to produce this version of what most scholars regard as the masterpiece of the Attic drama. It appeared in the autumn of 1877, the preface (an unusual appearance of the poet in his own person) being dated on October 1st of that year.

It is not likely that Carlyle repeated his recommendation after reading Browning's version of the *Agamemnon* ; for indeed it is hard to say much in its favour, and it is not easy to understand the spirit in which it was produced. That Browning felt some explanation to be necessary is evident from his unusual indulgence in a preface ; but it cannot be said that the explanation is satisfactory. The principle of translation which he asserts and defends,—“to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our

INTRODUCTION

language"—is radically false ; for here, as well as elsewhere, is it true that "the letter killeth." It can (unless it is carried so far as to be more obscure than the original) produce a serviceable "crib" to assist the student of the original tongue; it cannot in any true sense "translate" it, or represent it to a person unacquainted with Greek. It was not the method pursued by Browning when dealing with his favourite Euripides ; and it may be suspected that his practice is a truer indication of his real feelings than his theory. If he wished to carry further the controversy as to the rival merits of Aeschylus and Euripides, it was hardly fair to weight the scales in this way. A passage in the preface would seem to hint that he wished to discredit the claim of perfection of style which is often made on behalf of the Greeks ; but it is difficult to suppose that he considered his method of procedure a fair one. Extreme literalness of translation into a language of wholly different structure and character would ruin the style of the most perfect artists in literature,—of Virgil and Milton, no less than of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The result must stand as a perverse *tour de force*, only partially redeemed by the rough vigour of some of the choric odes.

An additional, and particularly unintelligible, perversity is shown in the metre chosen to represent the Greek iambic. Why Browning should have regarded an eleven-syllabled line,—a blank verse with a superfluous syllable at the end of

INTRODUCTION

each line—as a better counterpart of the Greek metre of six iambic feet (or their equivalent) than ordinary blank verse passes comprehension. The result is peculiarly unfortunate, and gives a monotony to the non-choric passages which is neither fair to the original nor pleasing in itself.

The greater the reader's admiration for Aeschylus and Browning, the deeper must be his regret that their collocation should have done so little justice to either.

It may be observed further, though the matter is of less importance, that Browning is not quite happy in his defence of his method of spelling Greek names. If Greek and English vowel sounds were identical, transliteration would no doubt be the correct procedure; but since they are not, transliteration is often as far from the truth as the more common Latinisation. "Thoukudides," pronounced with the English vowel sounds, is at least as bad as "Thucydides" pronounced with the English consonantal sounds. The reformed pronunciation of classical languages, now generally adopted in English schools, will eventually bring salvation in this matter.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY	I
THE INN ALBUM	193
THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS	291

PORTRAIT

ROBERT BROWNING (AGED 76)

*From the bronze medallion by Gustav Natorp (1888) in the
possession of Reginald J. Smith, Esq., K.C.* FRONTISPIECE

*PERSONS IN THE
TRANSCRIBED PLAY OF "HERAKLES"*

AMPHITRUON

MEGARA

LUKOS

HERAKLES

IRIS

LUTTA (*Madness*)

Messenger

THESEUS

Chorus of Aged Thebans

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY
INCLUDING
A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES
BEING THE
LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUCTION

VOL. VIII

οὐκ ἔσθω κενίβρει' · ὁπότεν δὲ θίῃς τι κάλει με.

**I eat no carrion ; when you sacrifice
Some cleanly creature—call me for a slice !**

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

1875

WIND, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,
Balaustion, from—not sorrow but despair,
Not memory but the present and its pang !
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart :
Never, while I live, may I see thee more, 5
Never again may these repugnant orbs
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow
—Death's entry, Haides' outrage !

Doomed to die,—

Fire should have flung a passion of embrace 10
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)
Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped,
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back ! 15
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,
Buried below Olumpos and its gods,
Akropolis to dominate her realm
For Koré, and console the ghosts ; or, sea,
What if thy watery plural vastitude, 20
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,
Might upon might, a moment,—stood, one stare,
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave
Glassing that marbled last magnificence,—
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the
grey, 25

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And when wave broke and overswarmed and,
sucked
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,
Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,
Attiké was, Athenai was not now !

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared. 30
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs
To blinding,—bear me thence, bark, wind and
wave !

Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,
Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,
Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride, 35
Zeus' darling : thither speed us, homeward-bound,
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away
From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes !

Why should despair be ? Since, distinct above
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind 40
And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low,—
Since disembodied soul anticipates
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)
Above all crowding, crystal silentness, 45
Above all noise, a silver solitude :—
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"
There live in peace, there work in hope once more—
O nothing doubt, Philemon ! Greed and strife, 50
Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
In yon blue liberality of heaven ?
How the sea helps ! How rose-smit earth will rise
Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be
Rhodes !

Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant—in their name, 55
Believe—o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world
 Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"
 Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides
 Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man ! 60

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep
 Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,
 Quieted out of weakness into strength.
 I dare invite, survey the scene my sense
 Staggered to apprehend : for, disenvolved 65
 From the mere outside anguish and contempt,
 Slowly a justice centred in a doom
 Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,
 Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.
 Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence 70
 Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low
 Rampart and bulwark lay, as,—timing stroke
 Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and
 swung,—

The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,
 In dance about the conqueror while he bade 75
 Music and merriment help enginery
 Batter down, break to pieces all the trust
 Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls
 Play substitute for the long double range
 Themistoklean, heralding a guest 80
 From harbour on to citadel! Each side
 Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,
 See,—outer wall as stonelike,—heads and hearts,—
 Athenai's terror-stricken populace!
 Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness,— 85
 Braggarts, who wring hands 'wont to flourish
 swords—

Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,
 (Argument dumb, authority a jest)
 Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout 90
 O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
 Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite,—
 Rivalities at truce now each with each,
 Stupefied mud-banks,—such an use they serve !
 While the one order which performs exact 95
 To promise, functions faithful last as first,
 What is it but the city's lyric troop,
 Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl ?
 Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care
 Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved, 100
 But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads !
 There let it grind to powder ! Perikles !
 The living are the dead now : death be life !
 Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth ? 105
 Prove thee Olympian ! If my heart supply
 Inviolable the structure,—true to type,
 Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,
 As Pheidias may inspire thee : slab on slab,
 Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud, 110
 Convert to gold yon west extravagance !
 'Neath Propylaia, from Akropolis
 By vapoury grade and grade, gold all the way,
 Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,
 Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through 115
 That shall be better and more beautiful
 And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn !
 Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre
 Predominates, one purple : Staghunt-month,
 Brings it not Dionusia ? Hail, the Three ! 120
 Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides
 Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.
 Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise—
 Their noble want the unworthy,—as of old,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

(How otherwise should patience crown their
 might ?) 125
 What if each find his ape promoted man,
 His censor raised for antic service still ?
 Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,
 Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,
 Eruxis—I suspect, Euripides, 130
 No brow will ache because with mop and mow
 He gibes my poet ! There 's a dog-faced dwarf
 That gets to godship somehow, yet retains
 His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,
 More decent, indecorous just enough : 135
 Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,
 Grow Momos as thou Zeus ? Or didst thou sigh
 Rightly with thy Makaria ? “ After life,
 Better no sentiency than turbulence ;
 Death cures the low contention.” Be it so ! 140
 Yet progress means contention, to my mind.
 Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,
 Art silent by my side while words of mine
 Provoke that foe from which escape is vain
 Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall,— 145
 Memories asleep as, at the altar-foot
 Those Furies in the Oresteian song,—
 Do I amiss who, wanting strength, use craft,
 Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,
 Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw ? 150
 That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,
 Roots itself past upwrenching ; but coaxed
 forth,
 Encouraged out to practise fork and fang,—
 Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,
 It may pine, likelier die than if left swell 155
 In peace by our pretension to ignore,
 Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp
 Bruise and not brain the pest.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

A middle course!

What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
As the Three taught when either woke some woe, 16
—How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
We felt our puny hates refine to air,
Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand, 16
Our petty passions purify their tide.
So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!
Majestic on the stage of memory, 17
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!
What else in life seems piteous any more
After such pity, or proves terrible 17
Beside such terror?

Still—since Phrunichos
Offended, by too premature a touch
Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed—
(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy 18
Was—fine the poet, not reform thyself!)
Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse
Rather the prologue, well a year away,
Than the main misery, a sunset old.
What else but fitting prologue to the piece
Style an adventure, stranger than my first 18
By so much as the issue it enwombed
Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?
Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,
That eve I told the earlier to my friends!
Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth 19
Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Could disengage the lip-flower furled to bud
 For fear Admetos,—shivering head and foot,
 As with sick soul and blind averted face
 He trusted hand forth to obey his friend,— 195
 Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,
 Nor see the disenshrouded statue start
 Alkestis, live the life and love the love !
 I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,
 Outsmoothing galingale and watermint 200
 Its mat-floor? while atbrim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,
 What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,
 Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,
 Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms !
 Lenaia was a gladsome month ago— 205
 Euripides had taught "Andromedé :"
 Next month, would teach "Kresphontes"—which
 same month
 Someone from Phokis, who companioned me
 Since all that happened on those temple-steps,
 Would marry me and turn Athenian too. 210
 Now ! if next year the masters let the slaves
 Do Bacchic service and restore mankind
 That trilogy whereof, 't is noised, one play
 Presents the Bacchai,—no Euripides
 Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged 215
 By any such grand sunset of his soul,
 Exiles from dead Athenai,—not the live
 That 's in the cloud there with the new-born star !

Speak to the infinite intelligence,
 Sing to the everlasting sympathy ! 220
 Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine
 Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free !
 Condense our voyage into one great day
 Made up of sunset-closes : eve by eve,
 Resume that memorable night-discourse 225

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

When,—like some meteor brilliance, fire and filth,
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassy,
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff—
We made acquaintance with a visitor 230
Ominous, apparitional, who went
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.
Let us attempt that memorable talk,
Clothe the adventure's every incident
With due expression : may not looks be told, 235
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ,
they lose ?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace,
One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house, 240
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive !
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.
Not *you*, but—Euthukles had entered, grave,
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch
And message from the tripod : such it proved. 245

He first removed the garland from his brow,
Then took my hand and looked into my face.

“Speak good words !” much misgiving faltered I.

“Good words, the best, Balaustion ! He is crowned,
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast, 250
Since Aischulos required companionship.
Pour a libation for Euripides !”

When we had sat the heavier silence out—
“Dead and triumphant still !” began reply

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

To my eye's question. "As he willed he worked : 255
 And, as he worked, he wanted not, be sure,
 Triumph his whole life through, submitting work
 To work's right judges, never to the wrong—
 To competency, not ineptitude.
 When he had run life's proper race and worked 260
 Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try
 The stade's turn, should strength dare the double
 course.
 Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays
 Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed
 To lift along the athlete and ensure 265
 A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,
 The statist's olive as the poet's bay.
 Wiselier, he suffered not a twofold aim
 Retard his pace, confuse his sight, at once
 Poet and statist ; though the multitude 270
 Girded him ever 'All thine aim thine art ?
 The idle poet only ? No regard
 For civic duty, public service, here ?
 We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles !
 Not only could he write "Antigoné," 275
 But—since (we argued) whoso penned that piece
 Might just as well conduct a squadron,—straight
 Good-naturedly he took on him command,
 Got laughed at, and went back to making plays,
 Having allowed us our experiment 280
 Respecting the fit use of faculty.'
 No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.
 Soon the jeers grew : 'Cold hater of his kind,
 A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth !
 What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store 285
 Would stock ten cities ?' Shadow of an ass !
 No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark
 And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn
 O' the scorers to that final trilogy

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

'Hupsipulé,' 'Phoinissai,' and the Match 29c
 Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,
 Zethos against Amphon. Ended so?
 Nowise!—began again; for heroes rest
 Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man,
 And he who thus took Contemplation's prize 29c
 Turned stade-point but to face Activity.
 Out of all shadowy hands extending help
 For life's decline pledged to youth's labour still,
 Whatever renovation flatter age,—
 Society with pastime, solitude 30c
 With peace,—he chose the hand that gave the heart,
 Bade Macedonian Archelaos take
 The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.
 For fifty politicians' frosty work,
 One poet's ash proved ample and to spare: 30c
 He propped the state and filled the treasury,
 Counsell'd the king as might a meaner soul,
 Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead
 Of crown and sceptre, star his name about
 When these are dust; for him, Euripides 31c
 Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,
 Clashed thence 'Alkaion,' maddened 'Pentheus' up;
 Then music sighed itself away, one moan
 Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand;
 With her and music died Euripides. 31c

"The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,
 Agathon, writes thus much: the merchant-ship
 Moreover brings a message from the king
 To young Euripides, who went on board
 This morning at Mounuchia: all is true." 32c

I said "Thank Zeus for the great news and good!"

"Nay, the report is running in brief fire
 Through the town's stubbly furrow," he resumed:

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

—“ Entertains brightly what their favourite styles
 ‘The City of Gapers’ for a week perhaps, 325
 Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday
 Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month :
 How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,
 Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel
 A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize 330
 Not proper conger-fashion but in oil
 And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish-kind ;
 How all the captains of the triremes, late
 Victors at Arginousai, on return
 Will, for reward, be straightway put to death ; 335
 How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime,
 Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,
 Against Leogoras’ blood-mare koppa-marked,
 Valued six talents,—swore, accomplished so,
 The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe, 340
 A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine ;
 And having lost the match will—dine on herbs !
 Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,
 Outblazed by just ‘Euripides is dead’ !

“ I met the concourse from the Theatre, 345
 The audience flocking homeward : victory
 Again awarded Aristophanes
 Precisely for his old play chopped and changed
 ‘The Female Celebrators of the Feast’—
 That Thesmophoria, tried a second time. 350
 ‘Never such full success !’—assured the folk,
 Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth
 With ‘Euthukles, the bard’s own intimate,
 Balaustion’s husband, the right man to ask.’

“ ‘Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance
 know ? 355
 You were the couple constant at his cave :

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Tell us now, is it true that women, moved
By reason of his liking Krateros . . .'

"I answered 'He was loved by Sokrates.'

"'Nay,' said another, 'envy did the work ! 3
For, emulating poets of the place,
One Arridaïos, one Krateues, both
Established in the royal favour, these . . .'

"Protagoras instructed him," said I.

"'Phu,' whistled Comic Platon, 'hear the fact ! 3
'T was well said of your friend by Sophokles
'He hate our women? In his verse, belike :
But when it comes to prose-work,—ha, ha, ha !"
New climes don't change old manners : so, it
chanced,
Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night 3
With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,
(Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)
Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on
But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?
Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help.' 3

"I asked : Did not you write 'The Festivals' ?
You best know what dog tore him when alive.
You others, who now make a ring to hear,
Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,
Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize 3
Than this, myself assisted at, last year,
And gave its worth to,—spitting on the same ?
Appraise no poetry,—price cuttlefish,
Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,
Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy 3
On midnights ! I interpret no foul dreams."

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,
 Balaustion, say. After "Lusistraté"
 No more for me of "people's privilege,"
 No witnessing "the Grand old Comedy" 390
 Coëval with our freedom, which, curtailed,
 Were freedom's deathblow : relic of the past,
 When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,
 Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with
 flowers,

Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast 395
 Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the
 bone !"

I was a stranger : "For first joy," urged friends,
 "Go hear our Comedy, some patriot piece
 That plies the selfish advocates of war
 With argument so unevadable 400
 That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play
 Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit
 Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk !
 No : you hear knave and fool told crime and fault,
 And see each scourged his quantity of stripes. 405
 'Rough dealing, awkward language,' whine our
 fops :

The world's too squeamish now to bear plain words
 Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough :
 But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,
 We 've still our stage where truth calls spade a
 spade ! 410

Ashamed ? Phuromachos' decree provides
 The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,
 Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,
 Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.
 A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long ? 415
 Go hear next play !"

I heard "Lusistraté."
 Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught
As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece
By one appalled at Phaidra's fate,—the chaste, 420
Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained
To that same serpent of unchastity
She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died dis-
traught

Rather than make submission, loose one limb
Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue, 425
Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow
—I say, the piece by him who charged this piece
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,
May prove their match by willing to be good) 430
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure—
“Such outrage done the public—Phaidra named!
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,
Such insult cast on female character!”—

Why, when I saw that bestiality— 435
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,
That when, to point the moral at the close,
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair
Was “Reconciliation,” stripped her charms,
That exhibition simply bade us breathe, 440
Seemed something healthy and commendable
After obscenity grotesqued so much
It slunk away revolted at itself.

Henceforth I had my answer when our sage
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave 445
“You fail to fathom here the deep design!
All 's acted in the interest of truth,
Religion, and those manners old and dear
Which made our city great when citizens
Like Aristoides and like Miltiades 450
Wore each a golden tettix in his hair.”
What do they wear now under—Kleophon?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Well, for such reasons,—I am out of breath,
 But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past,—
 I did not go to see, nor then nor now, 455
 The “Thesmophoriazousai.” But, since males
 Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand
 Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,
 Euthukles had not missed the first display,
 Original portrait of Euripides 460
 By “Virtue laughingly reproving Vice” :
 “Virtue,”—the author, Aristophanes,
 Who mixed an image out of his own depths,
 Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time
 No more pretension to recondite worth ! 465
 No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue
 Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance
 Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith !
 All now was muck, home-produce, honestman
 The author's soul secreted to a play 470
 Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought “How thoroughly death alters things !
 Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great ?
 How natural seems grandeur in relief,
 Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm !” 475

Euthukles interposed—he read my thought—

“O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.
 The crowd 's enthusiastic, to a man :
 Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap
 Because of certain sparkles presumed ore, 480
 At first flash of true lightning overhead,
 They look up, nor resume their search too soon.
 The insect-scattering sign is evident,
 And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,
 Nor bustles any beetle of the brood 485
 With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Contrariwise, the cry is 'Honour him !'
 'A statue in the theatre !' wants one ;
 Another 'Bring the poet's body back,
 Bury him in Peiraios : o'er his tomb 490
 Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,
 The songstress-seiren, meed of melody :
 Thoukudides invent his epitaph !'
 To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus."

Our tribute should not be the same, my friend ! 495
 Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands !
 As for the vest outgrown now by the form,
 Low flesh that clothed high soul,—a vesture's fate—
 Why, let it fade, mix with the elements
 There where it, falling, freed Euripides ! 500
 But for the soul that 's tutelary now
 Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless—
 How better hail its freedom than by first
 Singing, we two, its own song back again,
 Up to that face from which flowed beauty—face 505
 Now abler to see triumph and take love
 Than when it glorified Athenai once ?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,
 Secured me—you, ends nowise, to my mind,
 In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain 510
 To follow cheerful weary Herakles
 Striding away from the huge gratitude,
 Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,
 Bound on the next new labour "height o'er height
 Ever surmounting,—destiny's decree !" 515
 Thither He helps us : that 's the story's end ;
 He smiling said so, when I told him mine—
 My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.
 Afterward, when the time for parting fell,
 He gave me, with two other precious gifts, 520

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

This third and best, consummating the grace,
"Herakles," writ by his own hand, each line.

"If it have worth, reward is still to seek.
Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize
And proved arch-poet : time must show !" he
smiled : 525
"Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge
me—
Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody—
Who ? I forget—proves nobody at all !"

Is not that day come ? What if you and I
Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame ? 530
We have not waited to acquaint ourselves
With song and subject ; we can prologuize
How, at Eurustheus' bidding,—hate strained
hard,—
Herakles had departed, one time more,
On his last labour, worst of all the twelve ; 535
Descended into Haides, thence to drag
The triple-headed hound, which sun should see
Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.
Down went the hero, "back—how should he
come ?"

So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy, 540
Who judged that absence testified defeat
Of the land's loved one,—since he saved the land
And for that service wedded Megara
Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule.
Ambition, greed and malice seized their prey, 545
The Heracleian House, defenceless left,
Father and wife and child, to trample out
Trace of its hearth-fire : since extreme old age
Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,
And child may grow up man and take revenge. 550

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Hence see we that, from out their palace-home
 Hunted, for last resource they cluster now
 Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants
 About their courtyard altar,—Household Zeus
 It is, the Three in funeral garb beseech, 555
 Delaying death so, till deliverance come—
 When did it ever?—from the deep and dark.
 And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's
 voice. . . .

Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?

Suddenly, torch-light ! knocking at the door, 560
 Loud, quick, "Admittance for the revels' lord !"
 Some unintelligible Komos-cry—
Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,
Dionusos, Bacchos, Phales, Iacchos,
In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel, 565
Where it buries in the spread of the bushy myrtle-bed !
 (Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that !)
 Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,
 Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,
 And ever "Open, open, Bacchos bids !" 570

But at last—one authoritative word,
 One name of an immense significance :
 For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.

There trooped the Choros of the Comedy
 Crowned and triumphant ; first, those flushed
 Fifteen 575
 Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.
 Then marched the Three,—who played Mnesi-
 lochos,
 Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,
 Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content
 That morning in Athenai. Masks were down 580
 And robes doffed now ; the sole disguise was drink.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Mixing with these—I know not what gay crowd,
 Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent
 Among them,—doubtless draped with such reserve
 As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine 585
 (Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)
 Which women pay who in the streets walk bare,—
 Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance !
 Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,
 —All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith, 590
 The Conservation of True Poesy—
 Could 't but penetrate the deep design !
 Elaphion, more Peiraïos-known as "Phaps,"
 Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band
 Who came in front now, as the first fell back ; 595
 And foremost—the authoritative voice,
 The revels-leader, he who gained the prize,
 And got the glory of the Archon's feast—
 There stood in person Aristophanes.

And no ignoble presence ! On the bulge 600
 Of the clear baldness,—all his head one brow,—
 True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there
 surged
 A red from cheek to temple,—then retired
 As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame,—
 Was never nursed by temperance or health. 605
 But huge the eyeballs rolled back native fire,
 Imperiously triumphant : nostrils wide
 Waited their incense ; while the pursed mouth's spout
 Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,
 While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown
 back, 610
 Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,
 These made a glory, of such insolence—
 I thought,—such domineering deity
 Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path 615
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.
Impudent and majestic : drunk, perhaps,
But that 's religion ; sense too plainly snuffed :
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most proved most true. 620
There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning
At ease of undisputed mastery
Over the body's brood, those appetites.
Oh but he grasped them grandly, as the god
His either struggling handful,—hurtless snakes 625
Held deep down, strained hard off from side and
side !

Mastery his, theirs simply servitude,
So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.
Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed ?
At mandate of one muscle, order reigned. 630
They had been wreathing much familiar now
About him on his entry ; but a squeeze
Choked down the pests to place : their lord stood
free.

Forward he stepped : I rose and fronted him.

" Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides ! " 635
(So he began) " Hail, each inhabitant !
You, lady ? What, the Rhodian ? Form and face,
Victory's self upsoaring to receive
The poet ? Right they named you . . . some rich
name,
Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants, 640
Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched
By the Isle's unguent : some diminished end
In *ion*, Kallistion ? delicater still,
Kubelion or Melittion,—or, suppose

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

(Less vulgar love than bee or violet) 645
 Phibalion, for the mouth split red-fig-wise,
 Korakinidion for the coal-black hair,
 Nettareion, Phabion for the darlingness?
 But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,
 We near the balsam-bloom—Balaustion! Thanks, 650
 Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you
 know?
 Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,
 As Pindaros sings somewhere prettily,
 Here blooms his offspring, earth-flesh with sun-
 fire,
 Rhodes' blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, 655
 boy!
 Why does the boy hang back and baulk an ode
 Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,
 Sunshinefraystorchlight. Witnesswhomyouscare,
 Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!
Pho, you have quenched my Komos by first frown, 660
 Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs
 From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?
 You've eaten cuckoo-apple! Dumb, you dogs?
 So much good Thasian wasted on your throats
 And out of them not one *Threttanelo*? 665
Neblaretai! Because this earth-and-sun
 Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?
 Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most
 Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!
 You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps, 670
 Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,
 Who late, supremely unabashable,
 Propped up my play at that important point
 When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?
 Ha, ha,—thank Hermes for the lucky throw,— 675
 We came last comedy of the whole seven,
 So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,
 We two between us ! What, you fail your friend ?
 Away then, free me of your cowardice ! 680
 Go, get you the goat's breakfast ! Fare afield,
 Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,
 Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,
 So you but rid me of such company !
 Once left alone, I can protect myself 685
 From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled
 On much disapprobation and mistake !
 She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside !
 Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well
 As Phoibos' bay.

“ They take me at my word ! 690

One comfort is, I shall not want them long,
 The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, 'Curtail expense !'
 The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth !
 Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,
 Save birds' wings, beetles' armour, spend the cash 695
 In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,
 Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,
 And what not : any cost but Comedy's !
 ' No Choros '—soon will follow ; what care I ?
 Archinos and Agurrhios, scrape your flint, 700
 Flay your dead dog, and curry favour so !
 Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,
 We lose the boys' vote, lose the song and dance,
 Lose my Elaphion ! Still, the actor stays.
 Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard 705
 Kudathenaian and Pandionid,
 Son of Philippos, Aristophanes
 Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,
 Though stinted to mere sober prosy verse—
 'Manners and men,' so squeamish gets the world ! 710
 No more 'Step forward, strip for anapæsts !'

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

No calling naughty people by their names,
No tickling audience into gratitude
With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,
No setting Salabaccho . . ."

As I turned— 715

"True, lady, I am tolerably drunk :
The proper inspiration ! Otherwise,—
Phrunichos, Choirilos !—had Aischulos
So foiled you at the goat-song ? Drink 's a god.
How else did that old doating driveller 720
Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece
The 'Clouds' ? I swallowed cloud-distilment—
dew

Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow
And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest ;
While he worked at his 'Willow-wicker-flask,' 725
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,
Somehow result was—what it should not be
Next time, I promised him and kept my word !
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I'll be bound, 730
Mendesian, merely : triumph-night, you know,
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,
And, since war worsens all things, stingily
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,
Choros and actors and their lord and king 735
The poet ; supper, still he needs must spread—
And this time all was conscientious fare :
He knew his man, his match, his master—made
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor wine :
So merriment increased, I promise you, 740
Till—something happened."

Here he strangely paused.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

“After that,—well, it either was the cup
To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed,—
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose 745
Of new libation? Did you only know
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk.”

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,
Watch, in the water! But a second since,
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea, 750
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the
cause?

Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport! 755
Just so, some overshadow, some new care
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face
And left there only such a dark surmise
—No wonder if the revel disappeared,
So did his face shed silence every side! 760
I recognized a new man fronting me.

“So!” he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,
“You see myself? Balaustion's fixed regard
Can strip the proper Aristophanes
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style 765
His accidents? My soul sped forth but now
To meet your hostile survey,—soul unseen,
Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence
With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,
Just as my visible body paced the street, 770
Environed by a boon companionship
Your apparition also puts to flight.
Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,
I front my foe—no comicality

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Round soul, and body-guard in banishment? 775
 Thank your eyes' searching, undisguised I stand :
 The merest female child may question me.
 Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion !"

I did speak :

"Bold speech be—welcome to this honoured
 • hearth,
 Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow 780
 O' the humourist who castigates his kind,
 Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays
 On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
 Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
 After a moment's laying black earth bare. 785
 Splendour of wit that springs a thunderball—
 Satire—to burn and purify the world,
 True aim, fair purpose : just wit justly strikes
 Injustice,—right, as rightly quells the wrong,
 Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armoury 790
 The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,
 No damage else, sagacious of true ore ;
 Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath
 O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton,—
 Though alien gauds be singed,—undesecrate, 795
 The genuine solace of the sacred brow.
 Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star
 Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,
 To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,
 Athenai from the rock she steers for straight ! 800
 O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,
 No matter for the murk that was,—perchance,
 That will be,—certes, never should have been
 Such orb's associate !

"Aristophanes !
 'The merest female child may question you ?' 805

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave
Appalled our coast : for many a darkened day,
Intolerable mystery and fear.

Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied
peak,

Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb,— 81c
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.

'T is Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,'
Declared the priests, 'no way appeasable
Unless perchance by virgin sacrifice !' 81f

Thus grew the terror and o'erhung the doom—
Until one eve a certain female-child

Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,
And there sat down and sang to please herself.
When all at once, large-looming from his wave, 82c

Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the
ledge,

A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw ;
So much she sees now, and does reverence !" 82f

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin !
Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.
No very godlike trace retained the mouth
Which mocked with—

"So, He taught you tragedy !
I always asked 'Why may not women act ?' 83f

Nay, wear the comic visor just as well ;
Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise
And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,
Real women playing women as men—men !

I shall not wonder if things come to that, 83.
Some day when I am distant far enough.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Do you conceive the quite new Comedy
When laws allow ? laws only let girls dance,
Pipe, posture,—above all, Elaphionize,
Provided they keep decent—that is, dumb. 840
Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,
Had I but two lives : one were overworked !
How penetrate encrusted prejudice,
Pierce ignorance three generations thick
Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary ? 845
He battered with a big Megaric stone ;
Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence
This club I wield now, having spent my life
In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine ;
Somebody else must try mere polished steel !” 850

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,
“ Meanwhile,” said I, “ since planed and studded
club
Once more has pashed competitors to dust,
And poet proves triumphant with that play
Euthukles found last year unfortunate,— 855
Does triumph spring from smoothness still more
smoothed,
Fresh studs sown thick and threefold ? In plain
words,
Have you exchanged brute-blows,—which teach
the brute
Man may surpass him in brutality,—
For human fighting, or true god-like force 860
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all ?
Have you essayed attacking ignorance,
Convicting folly, by their opposites,
Knowledge and wisdom ? not by yours for ours,
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old, 865
Greater for less, your crime for our mistake !
If so success at last have crowned desert,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern
At your discovery such wild waste of strength
—And what strength!—went so long to keep in
vogue 870

Such warfare—and what warfare!—shamed so fast,
So soon made obsolete, as fell their foe
By the first arrow native to the orb,
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes)— “
Was this conviction's entry that same strange 875
'Something that happened' to confound your feast?"

“Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,
First 'Thesmophoriazousai'? Well and good!
But did he also see,—your Euthukles,—
My 'Grasshoppers' which followed and failed too, 880
Three months since, at the 'Little-in-the-Fields'?"

“To say that he did see that First—should say
He never cared to see its following.”

“There happens to be reason why I wrote
First play and second also. Ask the cause! 885
I warrant you receive ere talk be done,
Fit answer, authorizing either act.
But here 's the point : as Euthukles made vow
Never again to taste my quality,
So I was minded next experiment 890
Should tickle palate—yea, of Euthukles!
Not by such utter change, such absolute
A topsyturvy of stage-habitude
As you and he want,—Comedy built fresh,
By novel brick and mortar, base to roof,— 895
No, for I stand too near and look too close!
Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,
Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!
Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Not overtasks, though : give fit strength fair play, 900
 And strength 's a demiourgos ! Art renewed ?
 Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out—first
 The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer :
 ' More of the old provision none supplies
 So bounteously as thou,—our love, our pride, 905
 Our author of the many a perfect piece !
 Stick to that standard, change were decadence !'
 Next, the unfriendly : ' This time, strain will tire,
 He 's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist !'
 —Or better, in some Salaminian cave 910
 Where sky and sea and solitude make earth
 And man and noise one insignificance,
 Let strength propose itself,—behind the world,—
 Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies
 Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost ! 915
 After which,—clap-to closet and quit cave,—
 Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,
 And yet esteem the silken company
 So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistle down,
 For aught their praise or blame should joy or
 grieve. 920
 Strength amid crowds as late in solitude
 May lead the still life, ply the wordless task :
 Then only, when seems need to move or speak,
 Moving—for due respect, when statesmen pass,
 (Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin) 925
 Speaking—when fashion shows intelligence,
 (Strength, in the cave, oft whistled to the gulls)
 In short, has learnt first, practised afterwards !
 Despise the world and reverence yourself,—
 Why, you may unmake things and remake things, 930
 And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,
 What 's made or marred : ' you teach men, are not
 taught !'
 So marches off the stage Euripides !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

" No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine,
 No such faint fume of fancy sates my soul, 935
 No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,
 Suits either : give me Iostephanos
 Worth making happy what coarse way she will—
 O happy-maker, when her cries increase
 About the favourite ! ' Aristophanes ! 940
 More grist to mill, here 's Kleophon to grind ! ,
 He 's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede
 Even Dekelcia ! Here 's Kleonumos
 Declaring—though he threw away his shield,
 He 'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside ! 945
 Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights—
 He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling :
 Here 's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,
 The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist !
 So, bustle ! Pounce on opportunity ! 950
 Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,
 Find food for folk agape at either end,
 Mad for amusement ! Times grow better too,
 And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.
 In no case, venture boy-experiments ! 955
 Old wine 's the wine : new poetry drinks raw :
 Two plays a season is your pledge, beside ;
 So, give us 'Wasps' again, grown hornets now ! "

Then he changed.

" Do you so detect in me—
 Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curved cheek, carved
 lip, 960
 Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye—
 What suits the—stigma, I say,—style say you,
 Of 'Wine-lees-poet' ? Bravest of buffoons,
 Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene
 Than Murtilos, Hermippos : quite a match 965
 In elegance for Eupolis himself,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?
 Graced with traditional immunity
 Ever since, much about my grandsire's time,
 Some funny village-man in Megara, 970
 Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,
 As due religious drinking-bouts came round,
 To daub his phyz,—no, that was afterward,—
 He merely mounted cart with mates of choice
 And traversed country, taking house by house, 975
 At night,—because of danger in the freak,—
 Then hollaed 'Skin-flint starves his labourers!
 Clench-fist stows figs away, cheats government!
 Such an one likes to kiss his neighbour's wife,
 And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!' 980
 Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale,
 Dancing and verse, and there 's our Comedy,
 There 's Mullos, there 's Euetes, there 's the stock
 I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!
 Protected? Punished quite as certainly 985
 When Archons pleased to lay down each his law,—
 Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort,—
 Each season, 'No more naming citizens,
 Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!
 Observe, henceforth no Areopagite 990
 Demean his rank by writing Comedy!'
 (Theyoneandallcouldwrite the 'Clouds' of course.)
 'Needs must we nick expenditure, allow
 Comedy half a choros, supper—none,
 Times being hard, while applicants increase 995
 For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy.'
 Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof
 Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,
 Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank
 Concession to mere mortal levity, 1000
 Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world!
 Your proud Euripides from first to last

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Doled out some five such, never deigned us more!
 And these—what curds and whey for marrowy wine!
 That same Alkestis you so rave about 1005
 Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,
 The prig!—why trifle time with toys and skits
 When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise
 With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,
 Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, 'Life 's not Life,' 1010
 'The tongueswore, but unsworn the mind remains,'
 And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree-fruit
 Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,
 He lay, let Comics laugh—for privilege!
 Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off, 1015
 But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,
 Buffet by blow : plenty of proverb-pokes
 At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs!
 No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,
 No protest against infamous abuse, 1020
 Malignant censure,—nought to prove I scourged
 With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!
 If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,
 The aggriever must be—Aischulos perhaps :
 Or Sophokles he 'd take exception to. 1025
 —Do you detect in me—in me, I ask,
 The man like to accept this measurement
 Of faculty, contentedly sit classed
 Mere Comic Poet—since I wrote 'The Birds' ?"

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise. 1030

"Thanks!" he resumed, so quick to construe smile!
 "I answered—in my mind—these gapers thus :
 Since old wine's ripe and new verse raw, you judge—
 What if I vary vintage-mode and mix
 Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew, 1035
 Fining, refining, gently, surely, till

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The educated taste turns unawares
 From customary dregs to draught divine?
 Then answered—with my lips : More 'Wasps'
 you want?
 Come next year and I give you 'Grasshoppers' ! 1040
 And 'Grasshoppers' I gave them,—last month's
 play.

They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,
 No longer Triphales but Trilophos,
 (Whom I called Darling-of-the-Summertime,
 Born to be nothing else but beautiful 1045
 And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)
 Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,
 That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch
 Above the ant-and-emmet populace)
 To summon all who meadow, hill and dale 1050
 Inhabit—bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly—
 To band themselves against red nipper-nose
 Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess—
 Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,
 Because her sons are grown effeminate 1055
 To that degree—so morbidifies their flesh
 The poison-drama of Euripides,
 Morals and music—there 's no antidote
 Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,
 And brings us back perchance the blessed time 1060
 When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty
 Firm in primæval virtue, antique faith,
 Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire-sage,
 Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,
 Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon, 1065
 But just employed their brains on '*Ruppapai*,
 Row, boys, munch barley-bread, and take your
 ease—

Mindful, however, of the tier beneath !'
 Ah, golden epoch ! while the nobler sort

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

(Such needs must study, no contesting that !) 1070
 Wore no long curls but used to crop their hair,
 Gathered the tunic well about the ham,
 Remembering 't was soft sand they used for seat
 At school-time, while—mark this—the lesson long,
 No learner ever dared to cross his legs ! 1075
 Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough
 And sing for supper—'t was some grave romaunt
How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,
Jumped into hedge, by mortals quickset called,
And there, anticipating Oidipous, 1080
Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.
 None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,
 To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle-trash,
 Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete !
 Next, my Antistrophé was—praise of Peace : 1085
 Ah, could our people know what Peace implies !
 Home to the farm and furrow ! Grub one's vine,
 Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,
 When wife 's busy bathing ! Eat and drink,
 And drink and eat, what else is good in life ? 1090
 Slice hare, toss pancake, gaily gurgle down
 The Thasian grape in celebration due
 Of Bacchos ! Welcome, dear domestic rite,
 When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,
 Pour peasoup as we chant delectably 1095
In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels !
 Enough, you comprehend,—I do at least !
 Then,—be but patient,—the Parabasis !
 Pray ! For in that I also pushed reform.
 None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag, 1100
 Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much !
 No ! If some merest word in Art's defence
 Justice demanded of me,—never fear !
 Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.
 A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know) 1105

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?
 'I have flown far,' chirped he, 'North, East,
 South, West,
 And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig
 If matched with Bald-head here, Aigina's boast,
 Who in this play bids rivalry despair 1110
 Past, present, and to come, so marvellous
 His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!
 Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak
 Of dinner every day at public cost
 I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves, 1115
 My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!
 No more! no sort of sin against good taste!
 Then, satire,—Oh, a plain necessity!
 But I won't tell you: for—could I dispense
 With one more gird at old Ariphrades? 1120
 How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh—
 Ever finds out some novel infamy
 Unutterable, inconceivable,
 Which all the greater need was to describe
 Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . . 1125
 Now, what 's your gesture caused by? What
 you loathe,
 Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains
 To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!
 My audience justified you! Housebreakers!
 This pattern-purity was played and failed 1130
 Last Rural Dionusia—failed! for why?
 Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.
 He had been mindful to engage the Four—
 Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family—
 Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops, 1135
 Choros gigantically poked his fun,
 The boys' frank laugh relaxed the seniors' brow,
 The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,
 Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Of wisdom for the future. Purity? 1140
 No more of that next month, Athenai mine!
 Contrive new cut of robe who will,—I patch
 The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!
 The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up
 With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you! 1145

“Yes, I took up the play that failed last year, ‘
 And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in,—
 No Parachoregema,—men to match
 My women there already; and when these
 (I had a hit at Aristullos here, 1150
 His plan how womankind should rule the roast)
 Drove men to plough—‘A-field, ye cribbed of
 cape!’

Men showed themselves exempt from service
 straight
 Stupendously, till all the boys cried ‘Brave!’
 Then for the elders, I bethought me too, 1155
 Improved upon Mnesilochos’ release
 From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:
 I made his son-in-law Euripides
 Engage to put both shrewish wives away—
 ‘Gravity’ one, the other ‘Sophist-lore’— 1160
 And mate with the Bald Bard’s hetairai twain—
 ‘Goodhumour’ and ‘Indulgence’: on they tripped,
 Murrhiné, Akalanthis,—‘beautiful
 Their whole belongings’—crowd joined choros
 there!

And while the Toxotes wound up his part 1165
 By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,
 The woman-choros celebrated New
 Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite.
 Brief, I was chairéd and caressed and crowned
 And the whole theatre broke out a-roar, 1170
 Echoed my admonition—choros-cap—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces !
Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,
Since here by my side they have chosen their places !
 And so we all flocked merrily to feast, 1175
 I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes
 And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,
 At the Priest's supper ; and hilarity
 Grew none the less that, early in the piece,
 Ran a report, from row to row close-packed, 1180
 Of messenger's arrival at the Port
 With weighty tidings, 'Of Lusandros' flight,'
 Opined one ; 'That Eubolia penitent
 Sends the Confederation fifty ships,'
 Preferred another ; while 'The Great King's Eye 1185
 Has brought a present for Elaphion here,
 That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes !'
 Such was the supposition of a third.
 'No matter what the news,' friend Strattis laughed,
 'It won't be worse for waiting : while each click 1190
 Of the klepsudra sets a-shaking grave
 Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled
 By this time : dished in Sphettian vinegar,
 Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce!
 So, swift to supper, Poet ! No mistake, 1195
 This play ; nor, like the unflavoured "Grass-
 hoppers,"
 Salt without thyme !' Right merrily we supped,
 Till—something happened.

"Out it shall, at last !

"Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned
 To the Triumphant ! 'Kleonclapper erst, 1200
 Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides
 Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké
 For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak
Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon ! 1205
Ha ha, he he !' When suddenly a knock—
Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

" '*Babaiax* ! Sokrates a-passing by,
A-peering in for Aristullos' sake,
To put a question touching Comic Law ?' 1210

" No ! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,
Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as
mute,
(Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak !)
Grey brow still bent on ground, upraised at length
When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision
paused. 1215

" 'Priest !'—the deep tone succeeded the fixed
gaze—
'Thou carest that thy god have spectacle
Decent and seemly ; wherefore I announce
That, since Euripides is dead to-day,
My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month, 1220
Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded !'

" Then the grey brow sank low, and Sophokles
Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward : mutely
passed
'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly
With certain gods who convoy age to port ; 1225
And night resumed him.

" When our stupor broke,
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

' Dead—so one speaks now of Euripides !
Ungarlanded dance Choros, did he say ?
I guess the reason : in extreme old age 1230

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

No doubt such have the gods for visitants.
 Why did he dedicate to Herakles
 An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,
 Told him in dream who took the crown of gold ?
 He who restored Akropolis the theft, 1235
 Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge
 At thought of certain other crowns he filched
 From—who now visits Herakles the Judge.
 Instance "Medeia"! that play yielded palm
 To Sophokles; and he again—to whom? 1240
 Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!'
 'Ungarlanded, just means—economy!
 Suppress robes, chaplets, everything suppress
 Except the poet's present! An old tale
 Put capitably by Trugaios—eh? 1245
 —News from the world of transformation strange!
 How Sophokles is grown Simonides,
 And,—aged, rotten,—all the same, for greed
 Would venture on a hurdle out to sea!—
 So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos 1250
 Retorts—Mistake! Instead of stinginess,
 The fact is, in extreme decrepitude,
 He has discarded poet and turned priest,
 Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited
 In his own house too by Asklepios' self, 1255
 So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate
 Lies fallow; Iophon's the manager,—
 Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,
 Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink
 After your dozen-dozen prodigies! 1260
 Looking so old—Euripides seems young,
 Born ten years later.'

'Just his tricky style!
 Since, stealing first away, he wins first word
 Out of good-natured rival Sophokles,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Procures himself no bad panegyric. 1265
Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed
To pay survivor's-tribute,—harder squeezed
From anybody beaten first to last,
Than one who, steadily a conqueror,
Finds that his magnanimity is tasked 1270
To merely make pretence and—beat itself !'

“ So chirped the feasters though suppressedly.

“ But I—what else do you suppose ?—had pierced
Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes'
mock-praise,
And reached conviction hearted under all. 1275
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account,
And cut off, left unalterably clear
The summed-up value of Euripides.

Well, it might be the Thasian ! Certainly
There sang suggestive music in my ears ; 1280
And, through—what sophists style—the wall of
sense
My eyes pierced : death seemed life and life
seemed death,
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,
Conceived was just a moonstruck mood. Quite
plain
There re-insisted,—ay, each prim stiff phrase 1285
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,
Should life prove half true life's term,—death, the
rest.

As for the other question, late so large
Now all at once so little,—he or I, 1290
Which better comprehended playwright craft,—
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

As clear recurred our last word-interchange
Two years since, when I tried with 'Ploutos.'
'Vain!'

Saluted me the cold grave-bearded bard— 1295
'Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes!
None baulks the genius with impunity!
You know what kind 's the nobler, what makes
• grave

Or what makes grin; there 's yet a nobler still,
Possibly,—what makes wise, not grave,—and glad, 1300
Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears,
Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth—
Nay, greatest! Never needs the Art stand still,
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you, 1305
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside
Undoes the march: defection checks advance
Too late adventured! See the "Ploutos" here!
This step decides your foot from old to new—
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest, 1310
Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,
Make veritable men think, say and do.
Here 's the conception: which to execute,
Where 's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was
breath 1315

O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool—
Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame:
How should the night receive her due of fire
Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and
Birds,

Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content! 1320
The new adventure for the novel man
Born to that next success myself foresee
In right of where I reach before I rest.
At end of a long course, straight all the way,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Well may there tremble somewhat into ken 1325
 The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze !
 Nonemaylive two lives: I have lived mine through,
 Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.
 I leave my life's work. I compete with you,
 My last with your last, my Antiope— 1330
 Phoinissai—with this Ploutos? No, I think !
 Ever shall great and awful Victory
 Accompany my life—in Maketis
 If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend !
 Friend,—for from no consummate excellence 1335
 Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,
 Do I profess cstrangement : murk the marsh,
 Yet where a solitary marble block
 Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch !
 You show—what splinters of Pentelikos, 1340
 Islanded by what ordure ! Eagles fly,
 Rest on the right place, thence depart as free ;
 But 'ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire
 Untainted ! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.'

“ Balaustion ! Here are very many words, 1345
 All to portray one moment's rush of thought,—
 And much they do it ! Still, you understand.
 The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum
 And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,
 So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned 1350
 The parting cup,—‘ To the Good Genius, then ! ’

“ Up starts young Strattis for a final flash :
 ‘ Ay, the Good Genius ! To the Comic Muse,
 She who evolves superiority,
 Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsucess 1355
 And all that 's incomplete in human life ;
 Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,
 Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank—
 Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit 1360
 To soul and body, re-instate them Man :
 Beside which perfect man, how clear we see
 Divergency from type was earth's effect !
 Escaping whence by laughter,—Fancy's feat,—
 We right man's wrong, establish true for false,— 1365
 Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,
 Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence—
 Above unseemliness, reach decent law,—
 By laughter : attestation of the Muse
 That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed 1370
 Incontrovertibly man's portion here,
 Or, if here,—why, still high-and-fair exists
 In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul
 Lift by the Muse. Hail thou her ministrant !
 Hail who accepted no deformity 1375
 In man as normal and remediless,
 But rather pushed it to such gross extreme
 That, outraged, we protest by eye's recoil
 The opposite proves somewhere rule and law !
 Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos, 1380
 Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war !
 Philokleon—better bear a wrong than plead,
 Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth
 Of dikast with the due three-obol fee !
 The Paphlagonian—stick to the old sway 1385
 Of few and wise, not rabble-government !
 Trugaios, Pisthetairos, Strepsiades,—
 Why multiply examples ? Hail, in fine,
 The hero of each painted monster—so
 Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape ! 1390
 Pour out ! A laugh to Aristophanes !

“Stay, my fine Strattis”—and I stopped applause—
 “To the Good Genius—but the Tragic Muse !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

She who instructs her poet, bids man's soul
 Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods' 1395
 Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,
 Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed
 When will's last effort breaks in impotence!
 No power forego, elude: no weakness,—plied
 Fairly by power and will,—renounce, deny! 1400
 Acknowledge, in such miscalled weakness strength
 Latent: and substitute thus things for words!
 Make man run life's race fairly,—legs and feet,
 Craving no false wings to o'erfly its length!
 Trust on, trust ever, trust to end—in truth! 1405
 By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,
 Shame back all false display of either force—
 Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow,
 That cowardice shall shirk contending,—cant,
 Pretension, shrivel at truth's first approach! 1410
 Pour to the Tragic Muse's ministrant
 Who, as he pictured pure Hippolutos,
 Abolished our earth's blot Ariphrades;
 Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,
 Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible; 1415
 Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more,
 Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!
 A tear—no woman's tribute, weak exchange
 For action, water spent and heart's-blood saved—
 No man's regret for greatness gone, ungraced 1420
 Perchance by even that poor meed, man's praise—
 But some god's superabundance of desire,
 Yearning of will to 'scape necessity,—
 Love's overbrimming for self-sacrifice,
 Whence good might be, which never else may
 be, 1425
 By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere,—
 Effort expressible one only way—
 Such tear from me fall to Euripides!"

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The Thasian !—All, the Thasian, I account !
 Whereupon outburst the whole company 1430
 Into applause and—laughter, would you think ?

“ The unrivalled one ! How, never at a loss,
 He turns the Tragic on its Comic side
 Else imperceptible ! Here 's death itself—
 Death of a rival, of an enemy,— 1435

Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch
 Made it acknowledge Aristophanes !

Lo, that Euripidean laurel-tree
 Struck to the heart by lightning ! Sokrates
 Would question us, with buzz of how and why, 1440
 Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,
 Till we all wished him quiet with his friend ;

Agathon would compose an elegy,
 Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,
 And, stones responsive, we might wince, 't is like ; 1445

Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,
 Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake
 While we confess to a remorseful twinge :—

Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,
 Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand, 1450
 Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,
 Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,
 For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face !

Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top,
 And we recover the true mood, and laugh ! ” 1455

“ I felt as when some Nikias,—ninny-like
 Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse,—
 At fault a little, sees no choice but sound
 Retreat from foeman ; and his troops mistake
 The signal, and hail onset in the blast, 1460

And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,
 Back the old courage brings the scattered wits ;
 He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The happy error, blows the charge amain.
So I repaired things.

“ Both be praised ” thanked I. 1465
“ You who have laughed with Aristophanes,
You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears !
Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,
Tragic and Comic function of the god,
Help with libation to the blended twain ! 1470
Either of which who serving, only serves—
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour
To that Good Genius—complex Poetry,
Uniting each god-grace, including both :
Which, operant for body as for soul, 1475
Masters alike the laughter and the tears,
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.
Who dares disjoin these,—whether he ignores
Body or soul, whichever half destroys,—
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates 1480
Again the inexpressible crime we curse—
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence
Of august head and enthroned intellect,
With homelier symbol of asserted sense,— 1485
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,
Mutilate nature—what avails the Head
Left solitarily predominant,— 1490
Unbodied soul,—not Hermes, both in one ?
I, no more than our City, acquiesce
In such a desecration, but defend
Man's double nature—ay, wert thou its foe !
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides, 1495
Encounter thee, in nought would I abate
My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

On thee whose life-work preached 'Raise soul,
 sink sense !
 Evirate Hermes !'—would avenge the god,
 And justify myself. Once face to face, 1500
 Thou, the argute and tricky, shouldst not wrap,
 As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn
 The breast that quickened at the sting of truth,
 Nor turn from me, as, if the tale be true,
 From Lais when she met thee in thy walks, 1505
 And questioned why she had no rights as thou :
 Not so shouldst thou betake thee, 'be assured,
 To book and pencil, deign me no reply !
 I would extract an answer from those lips
 So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance ! 1510
 Gone from the world ! Does none remain to take
 Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill ?
 No sun makes proof of his whole potency
 For gold and purple in that orb we view :
 The apparent orb does little but leave blind 1515
 The audacious, and confused the worshipping ;
 But, close on orb's departure, must succeed
 The serviceable cloud,—must intervene,
 Induce expenditure of rose and blue,
 Reveal what lay in him was lost to us. 1520
 So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,
 If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,
 We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,
 The Rhodian rosy with Euripides ?
 Not of my audience on my triumph-day, 1525
 She nor her husband ! After the night's news
 Neither will sleep but watch ; I know the mood.
 Accompany ! my crown declares my right !
 And here you stand with those warm golden eyes !

"In honest language, I am scarce too sure 1530
 Whether I really felt, indeed expressed

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Then, in that presence, things I now repeat :
Nor half, nor any one word,—will that do ?
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base— 1535
The live rock latent under wave and foam :
Superimposure these ! Yet solid stuff
Will ever and anon, obeying star,
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye ?)
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame, 1540
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

“ Anyhow, I have followed happily
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,
Since, come to see you, I am shown—myself ! ”

I answered :

“ One of us declared for both 1545
' Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.'
The other adds : and,—if that glory last,
Nor marsh-born vapour creep to veil the same,—
Once entered, share in our solemnity !
Commemorate, as we, Euripides ! ” 1550

“ What ? ” he looked round, “ I darken the bright
house ?
Profane the temple of your deity ?
That 's true ! Else wherefore does he stand por-
trayed ?
What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,
Beard, freckled face, brow—all but breath, I hope ! 1555
Come, that 's unfair : myself am somebody,
Yet my pictorial fame 's just potter's-work,—
I merely figure on men's drinking-mugs !
I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,
Oft make a pair. But what 's this lies below ? 1560

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

His table-book and graver, playwright's tool !
 And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,
 Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-é-és*
 And *ke-é-é-é-és* and turns and trills,
 Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight ! 1565
 Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood
 Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings !
 With . . . what, and did he leave you 'Herakles' ?
 The 'Frenzied Hero,' one unfractured sheet,
 No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous
 wax— 1570
 Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen !
 This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere
 Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch,—
 No wonder ! This might crown 'Antiope.'
 'Herakles' triumph ? In your heart perhaps ! 1575
 But elsewhere ? Come now, I'll explain the case,
 Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet !"

I interrupted :

"Aristophanes !

The stranger-woman sues in her abode—
 'Be honoured as our guest !' But, call it—shrine, 1580
 Then 'No dishonour to the Daimon !' bids
 The priestess 'or expect dishonour's due !'
 You enter fresh from your worst infamy,
 Last instance of long outrage ; yet I pause,
 Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip, 1585
 Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence,—
 So you but suffer that I see the blaze
 And not the bolt,—the splendid fancy-fling,
 Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie
 Whence heavenly fire has withered ; impotent, 1590
 Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look
 Of yon impassive presence ! What he scorned,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

His life long, need I touch, offend my foot,
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came? 1595
I marvel, I deplore,—the rest be mute!
But, throw off hate's celestialty,—
Show me, apart from song-flash and wit-flame,
A mere man's hand ignobly clenched against
Yon supreme calmness,—and I interpose, 1600
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's
blow!"

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,
Aught had I spoken, save the final phrase :
Arrested there.

“Euripides grown calm!
Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,” 1605
He muttered; then more audibly began—

“Dead! Such must die! Could people com-
prehend!

There 's the unfairness of it! So obtuse
Are all: from Solon downward with his saw
'Let none revile the dead,—no, though the son, 1610
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!'—
To him who made Elektra, in the act
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults
Too much the very villain life-released. 1615
Now, / say, only after death, begins
That formidable claim,—immunity
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!
The living, who defame me,—why, they live:
Fools,—I best prove them foolish by their life, 1620
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!
Then—where 's the vital force, mine froze beside?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?
 The school-correctness, sure of wise award 1625
 When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?
 Where's censure that must sink me, judgment big
 Awaiting just the word posterity
 Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries
 —*whom*,

Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence? 1630
 But die, ere next Lenaia,—safely so
 You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,
 Stupidity and malice, to that hole
 O'er which survivors croak 'Respect the dead!'
 Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch 1635
 Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,
 (Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)
 And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,
 Whose cant was, certain years ago, my 'Clouds'
 Might last until the swallows came with Spring— 1640
 Whose chatter, 'Birds' are unintelligible,
 Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?
 List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!
O man of Mituléné, wondrous wise!

—Would not I rub each face in its own filth 1645
 To tune of 'Now that years have come and gone,
 How does the fact stand? What's demonstrable
 By time, that tries things?—your own test, not mine
 Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,
 Though somehow fools confute fools,—as these,
 you! 1650

Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes
 You cornered and called 'audience'! Face this *me*
 Who know, and can, and—helped by fifty years—
 Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!

"Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood, 1655
 Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Would hide head safe when hand had flung its
stone,

I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,
But flogged while skin could purple and flesh
start,

To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with. 1660

First face a-splutter at me got such splotch
Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw, •
Made its concern thenceforward not so much
To criticize me as go cleanse itself.

The only drawback to which huge delight,— 1665

(He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold
Sagacity you call Euripides !)

—Why, 't is that, make a muckheap of a man,
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,
Immortally immerded. Not so he ! 1670

Men pelted him but got no pellet back.

He reasoned, I 'll engage,—‘ Acquaint the world
Certain minuteness butted at my knee ?

Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist,—
What better would the manikin desire 1675

Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable
As who, so far up, fouled me in the flank ? ’

So dealt he with the dwarfs : we giants, too,
Why must we emulate their pin-point play ?
Render imperishable—impotence, 1680

For mud throw mountains ? Zeus, by mud un-
reached,—

Well, 't was no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at ! ”

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

“ And why must men remember, ages hence,
Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too— 1685
Strattis might steal from ! mixture-monument,
Recording what ? ’ I, Aristophanes,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Who boast me much inventive in my art,
 Against Euripides thus volleyed muck
 Because, in art, he too extended bounds. 1690
 I—patriot, loving peace and hating war,—
 Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,
 Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves
 However multiplied their mastery,—
 Despising most of all the demagogue, 1695
 (Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along
 By kindred breath of knave and fool below,
 Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face
 Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,
 Vacuity, just bellied out to break 1700
 And righteously bespatter friends the first)—
 I loathing,—beyond less puissant speech
 Than my own god-grand language to declare,—
 The fawning, cozenage and calumny
 Wherewith such favourite feeds the populace 1705
 That fan and set him flying for reward :—
 I who, detecting what vice underlies
 Thought's superstructure,—fancy's sludge and
 slime
 'Twixt fact's sound floor and thought's mere
 surface-growth
 Of hopes and fears which root no deeplier down 1710
 Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat—
 Namely, man's misconception of the God :—
 I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul
 That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,
 —Why, all my soul's supremacy of power 1715
 Did I pour out in volley just on him
 Who, his whole life long, championed every cause
 I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,
 Hating my hates, spurned falsehood, championed
 truth,—
 Championed truth not by flagellating foe 1720

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,
Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze
Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the
lip,

Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too,—
No, the balled fist broke brow like thunderbolt, 1725
Battered till brain flew ! Seeing which descent,
None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,
The avenger's with the vice he crashed through
bone.

Still, he displeased me ; and I turned from foe
To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud,— 1730
But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see.'
Pah ! stop mores shame, deep-cutting glory through,
Nor add, this poet, learned,—found no taunt
Tell like ' That other poet studies books !'
Wise,—cried ' At each attempt to move our hearts, 1735
He uses the mere phrase of daily life !'
Witty,—' His mother was a herb-woman !'
Veracious, honest, loyal, fair and good,—
' It was Kephisophon who helped him write !'

“ Whence,—O the tragic end of comedy !— 1740
Balaustion pities Aristophanes.

For, who believed him ? Those who laughed so
loud ?

They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese !
Had he called true cheese—curd, would muscle
move ?

What made them laugh but the enormous lie ? 1745
' Kephisophon wrote Herakles ? ha, ha,
What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the
soul

And set a-lying Aristophanes ?
Some accident at which he took offence !
The Tragic Master in a moody muse 1750

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Passed him unhailing, and it hurts—it hurts !
Beside, there 's licence for the Wine-lees-song!'"

Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye
flashed fierce.

" But this exceeds our licence ! Stay awhile—
That 's the solution ! both are foreigners, 1755
The fresh-come Rhodian lady and her spouse
The man of Phokis : newly resident,
Nowise instructed—that explains it all !
No born and bred Athenian but would smile,
Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance. 1760
These strangers have a privilege !

" You blame "

(Presently he resumed with milder mien)
" Both theory and practice—Comedy :
Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend
Rose to, and upraised friends along with him, 1765
No matter how. Once there, all 's cold and fine,
Passionless, rational ; our world beneath
Shows (should you condescend to grace so much
As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross—
A population which, mere flesh and blood, 1770
Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,
Then hugs as hugely : speaks too as it acts,
Prodigiously talks nonsense,—townsmen needs
Must parley in their town's vernacular.
Such world has, of two courses, one to choose : 1775
Unworld itself,—or else go blackening off
To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy
Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.
Now, since the world demurs to either course,
Permit me,—in default of boy or girl, 1780
So they be reared Athenian, good and true,—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

To praise what you most blame! Hear Art's
defence!

I'll prove our institution, Comedy,
Coëval with the birth of freedom, matched
So nice with our Republic, that its growth 1785
Measures each greatness, just as its decline
Would signalize the downfall of the pair.

Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!
You and your master don't acknowledge gods:
'They are not, no, they are not!' well,—began 1790
When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,
Found,—on recurrence of festivity
Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will
To children, as they took her vintage-gifts,—
Found—not the least of many benefits— 1795
That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed
The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,
Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts
aside.

So, emulating liberalities,
Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at
least, 1800

Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,
Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.
Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms
With skins, beast-fashion, daubed each phyzy with
dregs,

Then hollaed 'Neighbour, you are fool, you—
knave, 1805

You—hard to serve, you—stingy to reward!
The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,
And good folk gained thereby, 't was evident.
Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,
The notion came—not simply this to say, 1810
But this to do—prove, put in evidence,
And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw purse-string
tight,
As crowd might see, which only heard before.

"So played the Poet, with his man of parts ; 1815
 And all the others, found unqualified
 To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,
 Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,
 Anticipated the community,
 Gave judgment which the public ratified. 1820
 Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,
 They flung, for word-artillery, why—filth ;
 Still, folk who wiped the unsavoury salute
 From visage, would prefer the mess to wit—
 Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech, 1825
 As now the way is : then, the kindlier mode
 Was—drub not stab, ribroast not scarify !
 So did Sousarion introduce, and so
 Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art :
 Club,—if I call it,—notice what 's implied ! 1830
 An engine proper for rough chastisement,
 No downright slaying : with impunity—
 Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,
 Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.
 I kept the gained advantage : stickled still 1835
 For club-law—stout fun and allowanced thumps :
 Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke
 As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

"Next, whom thrash?
Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave?
Higher, more artificial, composite
Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm!
Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,
Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,
Or gives a pheasant to his neighbour's wife :

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

No ! strike malpractice that affects the State, 1845
 The common weal—intriguer or poltroon,
 Venality, corruption, what care I
 If shrewd or witless merely ?—so the thing
 Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright
 And happy, change her customs, lead astray 1850
 Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,
 The sophist in Palaistra, or—what 's worst,
 As widest mischief,—from the Theatre
 Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,
 Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult. 1855
 Are such to be my game ? Why, then there wants
 Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep !
 Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel
 Each boss, if I would bray—no callous hide
 Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof, 1860
 Or Kleon cased about with impudence !
 Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced spark-
 ling so
 That none smiled ' Sportive, what seems savagest,
 —Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth ! '
 Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well, 1865
 Since I pursued my warfare till each wound
 Went through the mere man, reached the principle
 Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos ?
 No, I attacked war's representative ;
 Kleon ? No, flattery of the populace ; 1870
 Sokrates ? No, but that pernicious seed
 Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught
 To jabber argument, chop logic, pore
 On sun and moon, and worship Whirligig.
 O your tragedian, with the lofty grace, 1875
 Aims at no other and effects as much ?
 Candidly : what 's a polished period worth,
 Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,
 When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

From just that selfsame moon he maunders of, 1880
 And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,
 Proposes to rich earth-blood—purity?
 In me, 't was equal-balanced flesh rebuked
 Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes
 Or starveling Chairephon; I challenged both,— 1885
 Strong understander of our common life,
 I urged sustainment of humanity.
 Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace—
 He 's silent as to cheesecakes Peace may chew;
 Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye 1890
 To what were better done than crowding Pnux—
 That's—dance '*Threttanelo*, the Kuklops drunk!'

"My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!
 Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:
 'No naming names in Comedy!' votes one, 1895
 'Nor vilifying live folk!' legislates
 Another, 'urge amendment on the dead!'
 'Don't throw away hard cash,' supplies a third,
 'But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!'
 Then Kleon did his best to bully me: 1900
 Called me before the Law Court: 'Such a play
 Satirized citizens with strangers there,
 Such other,'—why, its fault was in myself!
 I was, this time, the stranger, privileged
 To act no play at all,—Egyptian, I— 1905
 Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginetè,
 Lindian, or any foreigner he liked—
 Because I can't write Attic, probably!
 Go ask my rivals,—how they roughed my fleece,
 And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep 1910
 Shiver at distance from the snapping shears!
 Why must they needs provoke me?

"All the same,

No matter for my triumph, I foretell

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Subsidence of the day-star : quench his beams ?
 No Aias e'er was equal to the feat 1915
 By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times
 seven,
 'Twixt sky and earth ! 't is dullards soft and sure
 Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh
 And there a 'So let be, we pardon you !'
 Till the minute mist hangs a block, has tamed ' 1920
 Noonblaze to ' twilight mild and equable,'
 Vote the old women spinning out of doors.
 Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped
 And the bull gendered in the brave gold flare !
 O you shall have amusement,—better still, 1925
 Instruction ! no more horse-play, naming names,
 Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve !
 Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,
 What 's worthier limning than his household life ?
 His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse, 1930
 And how the son, instead of learning knead
 Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire
 By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,
 From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware :
 While pretty daughter Kepphé too much haunts 1935
 The shop of Sporgilos the barber ! brave !
 Out with Thearion's meal-tub politics
 In lieu of Pisthetairos, Strepsiades !
 That 's your exchange ? O Muse of Megara !
 Advise the fools '*Feed babe on weasel-lap* 1940
For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,
And rear, for man—Ariphrades, mayhap !'
 Yes, my Balaustion, yes, my Euthukles,
 That 's *your* exchange,—who, foreigners in fact
 And fancy, would impose your squeamishness 1945
 On sturdy health, and substitute such brat
 For the right offspring of us Rocky Ones,
 Because babe kicks the cradle,—crows, not mewls !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

“Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck
Whence all the plague springs—that first feud of all 1950
'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.

'Unworld the world' frowns he, my opposite.
I cry, 'Life!' 'Death,' he groans, 'our better
Life!'

Despise what is—the good and graspable,
Pæfer the out of sight and in at mind, 1955
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,
The jolly club-feast when our field 's in soak,
Roast thrushes, hare-soup, pea-soup, deep washed
down

With Peparethian ; the prompt paying off
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavoured
wench 1960

We caught among our brushwood foraging :
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,
And fall to magnifying misery !
Or, if you condescend to happiness,
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name 1965
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath your nose !
I need particular discourtesy

And private insult from Euripides
To render contest with him credible ?
Say, all of me is outraged ! one stretched sense, 1970
I represent the whole Republic,—gods,
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets,—prone,
And pummelled into insignificance,

If will in him were matched with power of stroke.
For see what he has changed or hoped to change ! 1975
How few years since, when he began the fight,
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through !

Plenty and peace, then ! Hellas thundersmote
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,
That morn salvation broke at Salamis, 1980
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still
 Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus?—he
 Holding as surely on to Herakles,—
 Who touched Zeus, link by link, the unruptured
 chain ! 1985
 Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail—
 With Pindaros, Theognis,—whom for sire?
 Homeros' self, departed yesterday !
 While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus,—
 Ah, people,—ah, lost antique liberty ! 1991
 We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth :
 Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop
 To constitute our title—ours such land !
 Outside of oil and breadstuff,—barbarism !
 What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve ! 1995
 Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,
 Content with peerless native products, home,
 Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,
 Such men, such women, and such gods their guard !
 The gods? he worshipped best who feared them
 most, 2000
 And left their nature uninquired into,
 —Nature? their very names ! pay reverence,
 Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be
 To prove benignantest of playfellows.
 With kindly humanism they countenanced 2005
 Our emulation of divine escapes
 Through sense and soul : soul, sense are made to
 use ;
 Use each, acknowledging its god the while !
 Crush grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos'
 sake !
 'T is Aphrodité's feast-day—frisk and fling, 2010
 Provided we observe our oaths, and house
 Duly the stranger : Zeus takes umbrage else !
 Ah, the great time—had I been there to taste !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Perikles, right Olumpian,—occupied
 As yet with getting an Olumpos reared 2015
 Marble and gold above Akropolis,—
 Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed
 For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?
 Who writes the Oresteia ?

“ Ah, the time !

For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue, 020
 A cold wind creeps through the close vineyard-rank,
 The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close
 Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash
 On breast. (Your pardon !) There 's a restless
 change,

Deterioration. Larks and nightingales 2025
 Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim
 Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.

Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,
 A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed,
 Occupy altar-base and temple-step, 2030

Are minded to indoctrinate our youth !
 How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude ?
 ‘ Wise men,’ their nomenclature ! Prodikos—
 Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps
 From way Theseia to the Tripods' way,— 2035

This empty noddle comprehends the sun,—
 How he 's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit
 His way from east to west, nor wants a steed !
 And here 's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,
 Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean, 2040
 Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance
 Yet knowledge also, since, on either side

Of any question, something is to say,
 Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb !
 And shall youth go and play at kottabos, 2045
 Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed ?
 Or dare keep Choes ere the problem 's solved—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?
'But sure the gods permit this, censure that?'
So tell them! straight the answer's in your teeth: 2050
'You relegate these points, then, to the gods?
What and where are they?' What my sire
supposed,
And where yon cloud conceals them! 'Till they
'scape
And scramble down to Leda, as a swan,
Europa, as a bull! why not as—ass 2055
To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!
Either—away with such ineptitude!
Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,
Stick to the good old stories, think the rain
Is—Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve! 2060
Think thunder's thrown to break Theoros' head
For breaking oaths first! Meanwhile let ourselves
Instruct your progeny you prate like fools
Of father Zeus, who's but the atmosphere,
Brother Poseidon, otherwise called—sea, 2065
And son Hephaistos—fire and nothing else!
Over which nothings there's a something still,
"Necessity," that rules the universe
And cares as much about your Choes-feast
Performed or intermitted, as you care 2070
Whether gnats sound their trump from head or
tail!
When, stupefied at such philosophy,
We cry—Arrest the madmen, governor!
Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles!—
Would you believe? The Olumpian bends his
brow, 2075
Scarce pauses from his building! 'Say they thus?
Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,
I had not known how simple proves eclipse
But for thy teaching! Go, fools, learn like me!'

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

" Well, Zeus nods : man must reconcile himself, 2080
 So, let the Charon's-company harangue,
 And Anaxagoras be—as we wish !
 A comfort is in nature : while grass grows
 And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,
 And honey from Brilesian hollow melts 2085
 On mouth, and Bacchis' flavorful lip beats both,
 You will not be untaught life's use, young man ?
Pho! My young man just proves that panniered ass
 Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,
 With whom a serpent bargained, bade him swap 2090
 The priceless boon for—water to quench thirst !
 What's youth to my young man ? In love with age,
 He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and frowns,
 Denies the plainest rules of life, long since
 Proved sound ; sets all authority aside, 2095
 Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,
 And think out thoroughly how youth should pass—
 Just as if youth stops passing, all the same !

" One last resource is left us—poetry !
 Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help, 2100
 Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,
 To save Sense, poet ! Bang the sophist-brood
 Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance
 By swearing wine is water, honey—gall,
 Saperdion—the Empousa ! Panie-smit, 2105
 Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve :
 Be yours to disenchant them ! Change things
 back !

Or better, strain a point the other way
 And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth !
 Lend wine a glory never gained from grape, 2110
 Help honey with a snatch of him we style
 The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,
 And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

" 'I, his successor,' gruff the answer grunts,
 'Incline to poetize philosophy, 2115
 Extend it rather than restrain; as thus—
 Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much,
 Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?
 Behold them ragged, sick, lame, halt and blind!
 Do they use speech? Ay, street-terms, market-
 phrase! 2120
 Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next
 But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky?
 Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,
 For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.
 Lift earth? I drop to, dally with, earth's dung! 2125
 —Recognize in the very slave—man's mate,
 Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,
 And reasonable as his lord, in brief.
 I paint men as they are—so runs my boast—
 Not as they should be: paint—what's part of man 2130
 —Women and slaves—not as, to please your pride,
 They should be, but your equals, as they are.
 O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,
 Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants
 "Zeus,—with thy cubit's length of attributes,— 2135
 May I, the ephemeral, ne'er scrutinize
 Who made the heaven and earth and all things
 there!"
 Myself shall say' . . . Ay, Herakles may help!
 Give me,—I want the very words,—attend!"

He read. Then "Murder's out,—'There are no
 Gods.' 2140

Man has no master, owns, by consequence,
 No right, no wrong, except to please or plague
 His nature: what man likes be man's sole law!
 Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,
 Man may reach freedom by your roundabout. 2145

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

'Never believe yourselves the freer thence !
There are no gods, but there 's "Necessity,"—
Duty enjoined you, fact in figment's place,
Throned on no mountain, native to the mind !
Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs 2150
And honey, for the sake of—what I dream,
A-sitting with my legs up !'

"Infamy !

The poet casts in calm his lot with these
Assailants of Apollon ! Sworn to serve
Each Grace, the Furies call him minister— 2155
He, who was born for just that roseate world
Renounced so madly, where what 's false is fact,
Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,
Where he lives, life itself disguised for him
As immortality—so works the spell, 2160
The enthusiastic mood which marks a man
Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,
Encircled with poetic atmosphere,
As lark emballed by its own crystal song,
Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes ! 2165
No, this were unreality ! the real
He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,
Truth, for all beauty ! Beauty, in all truth—
That 's certain somehow ! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like ? No ! 2170
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what 's most ugly proves most beautiful.
So much assistance from Euripides !

"Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,
To a concluding—'Go and feed the crows !' 2175
Do ! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,
Poetize your so precious system, do,
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers,—
 Your castigation follows prompt enough ! 2180
 When all 's concocted upstairs, heels o'er head,
 Down must submissive drop the masterpiece
 For public praise or blame : so, praise away,
 Friend Sokrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon !
 Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song, 2185
 Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men, slaves
 And women jumbled to a laughing-stock
 Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split !
 Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say !

“ She has it and she says it—there 's the curse!— 2190
 She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,
 The noble slaves, wise women, move as much
 Pity and terror as true tragic types :
 Applauds inventiveness—the plot so new,
 The turn and trick subsidiary so strange ! 2195
 She relishes that homely phrase of life,
 That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts :
 Accords him right to chop and change a myth :
 What better right had he, who told the tale
 In the first instance, to embellish fact ? 2200
 This last may disembellish yet improve !
 Both find a block : this man carves back to bull
 What first his predecessor cut to sphynx :
 Such genuine actual roarer, nature's brute,
 Intelligible to our time, was sure 2205
 The old-world artist's purpose, had he worked
 To mind ; this both means and makes the thing !
 If, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed
 In unctuous music—say, effeminate—
 We also say, like Kuthereia's self, 2210
 A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle
 Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.
 That 's Hellas' verdict !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

“ Does Euripides

Even so far absolved, remain content ?

Nowise ! His task is to refine, refine, 2215

Divide, distinguish, subtilize away

Whatever seemed a solid planting-place

For foot-fall,—not in that phantasmal sphere

Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth

Where people used to tread with confidence. 2220

There 's left no longer one plain positive

Enunciation incontestable

Of what is good, right, decent here on earth.

Nobody now can say ‘ this plot is mine,

Though but a plethron square,—my duty ! ’—

‘ Yours ? 2225

Mine, or at least not yours,’ snaps somebody !

And, whether the dispute be parent-right

Or children’s service, husband’s privilege

Or wife’s submission, there ’s a snarling straight,

Smart passage of opposing ‘ yea ’ and ‘ nay,’ 2230

‘ Should,’ ‘ should not,’ till, howe’er the contest end,

Spectators go off sighing—Clever thrust !

Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,

Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,

And set my name down ‘ for a trireme, good ’ ? 2235

Something I might have urged on t’ other side !

No doubt, Kresphontes or Bellerophon

We don’t meet every day ; but Stab-and-stitch

The tailor—ere I turn the drachmas o’er

I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks, 2240

I ’ll pose the blockhead with an argument !

“ So has he triumphed, your Euripides !

Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize :

That ’s quite another matter ! cause for that !

Still, when ’t was got by Ions, Iophons, 2245

Off he would pace confoundedly superb,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth
Till Sokrates winked, whispered : out it broke !
And Aristullos jotted down the jest,
While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow, 2250
Looked queerly, and the foreigners—like you—
Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile
—‘ And so, you value Ions, Iophons,
Euphorions ! How about Euripides ? ’
(Eh, brave bard's-champion ? Does the anger boil ? 2255
Keep within bounds a moment,—eye and lip
Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst !)
What strangers ? Archelaos heads the file !
He sympathizes, he concerns himself,
He pens epistle, each unsuccessful play : 2260
‘ Athenai sinks effete ; there 's younger blood
In Makedonia. Visit where I rule !
Do honour to me and take gratitude !
Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,
Which also means the statesman's : he who wrote 2265
Erechtheus may seem rawly politic
At home where Kleophon is ripe ; but here
My council-board permits him choice of seats.’
“ Now this was operating,—what should prove
A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit 2270
For many a year,—when I was moved, first man,
To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.
So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,
And dared what I am now to justify.
A serious question first, though !

“ Once again ! 2275
Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,
I made no estimate of power at all,
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class
Of fighters I might claim to join, beside
That class wherewith I cast in company ? 2280

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Say, you—profuse of praise no less than blame—
 Could not I have competed—franker phrase
 Might trulier correspond to meaning—still,
 Competed with your Tragic paragon?
 Suppose me minded simply to make verse, 2285
 To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,
 Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy,—
 Where was the hindrance? But my soul bade
 ‘Fight!
 Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;
 Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!’ 2290
 How? With degeneracy sapping fast
 The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old
 To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help
 —How did I fable?—War and Hubbub mash
 To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood, 2295
 Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,
 That greed might gorge, the while frivolity
 Rubbed hands and smacked lips o’er the dainty
 dish!
 Authority, experience—pushed aside
 By any upstart who pleads throng and press 2300
 O’ the people! ‘Think, say, do thus!’ Where-
 fore, pray?
 ‘We are the people: who impugns our right
 Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,
 Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,
 Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles 2305
 Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter’s son,
 Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work
 To go round bottles, and Nausikudes
 The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their
 mates,
 To think and say and do in our behalf!’ 2310
 While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,
 Found matter to propose, contest, defend,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

'Stablish, turn topsyturvy,—all the same,
 No matter what, provided the result
 Were something new in place of something old,— 2315
 Set wagging by pure insolence of soul
 Which needs must pry into, have warrant for
 Each right, each privilege good policy
 Protects from curious eye and prating mouth !
 Everywhere lust to shape the world anew, 2320
 Spurn this Athenai as we find her, build
 A new impossible Cloudcuckooburg
 For feather-headed birds, once solid men,
 Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,
 Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants, 2325
 King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,
 Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms !

“Where was I? Oh ! Things ailing thus—I ask,
 What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-
 heaped

Abomination with the exquisite 2330
 Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?
 Erechtheus shall harangue Amphiktuon,
 And incidentally drop word of weight
 On justice, righteousness, so turn aside
 The audience from attacking Sicily !— 2335
 The more that Choros, after he recounts
 How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,
 Shall add—at last fall of grave dancing-foot—
 ‘Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus !’
 That helps or hinders Alkibiades ? 2340
 As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus’ self
 And set him up, some half a mile away,
 His frown would frighten sparrows from your field !
 Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,
 But as for vulgar sparrows,—change the god, 2345
 And plant some big Priapos with a pole !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

I wield the Comic weapon rather—hate !
 Hate ! honest, earnest and directest hate—
 Warfare wherein I close with enemy,
 Call him one name and fifty epithets, 2350
 Remind you his great-grandfather sold bran,
 Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat
 He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,
 Protest he voted for a tax on air !
 And all this hate—if I write Comedy— 2355
 Finds tolerance, most like—applause, perhaps
 True veneration ; for I praise the god
 Present in person of his minister,
 And pay—the wilder my extravagance—
 The more appropriate worship to the Power 2360
 Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest :
 Otherwise,—that originative force
 Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
 Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,
 Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be, 2365
 Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and
 stones,
 Phales Iacchos.

“Comedy for me !

Why not for you, my Tragic masters ? Sneaks
 Whose art is mere desertion of a trust !
 Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club, 2370
 The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch,—
 Arms fit to bruise the boar's neck, break the chine
 O' the wolf,—and you must impiously—despise ?
 No, I 'll say, furtively let fall that trust
 Consigned you ! 'T was not 'take or leave alone,' 2375
 But 'take and, wielding, recognize your god
 In his prime attributes !' And though full soon
 You sneaked, subsided into poetry,
 Nor met your due reward, still,—heroize

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And speechify and sing-song and forego 2380
 Far as you may your function,—still its pact
 Endures, one piece of early homage still
 Exacted of you ; after your three bouts
 At hoitytoity, great men with long words,
 And so forth,—at the end, must tack itself 2385
 The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,
 Concession, with its wood-boys' fun and freak,
 To the true taste of the mere multitude.
 Yet, there again ! What does your Still-at-itch,
 Always-the-innovator ? Shrugs and shirks ! 2390
 Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five
 Are somehow suited : Satyrs dance and sing.
 Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,
 Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth
 on edge,
 Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport, 2395
 Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,
 Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare—
 When throats were promised Thasian ! Five such
 feats,—
 Then frankly off he threw the yoke : next Droll,
 Next festive drama, covenanted fun, 2400
 Decent reversion to indecency,
 Proved—your 'Alkestis' ! There 's quite fun
 enough,
 Herakles drunk ! From out fate's blackening wave
 Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,
 Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh 2405
 On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste !

“ For which sufficient reasons, in truth's name,
 I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,
 Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld
 Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep 2410
 Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,
Or gem, no iron joints its strength around,
From hand of—posturer, not combatant ! 2415

“ Such was my purpose : it succeeds, I say !
Have not we beaten Kallikratidas,
Not humbled Sparté ? Peace awaits our word,
Spite of Theramenes, and fools his like.
Since my previsions,—warranted too well 2420
By the long war now waged and worn to end—
Had spared such heritage of misery,
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.
Athenai, taught prosperity has wings,
Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see, 2425
From folly's premature decrepitude
Boiled young again, emerges from the stew
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,
One brilliance and one balsam,—sways and sits
Monarch of Hellas ! ay and, sage again, 2430
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,
No longer loves the brutish demagogue
Appointed by a bestial multitude
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they ?
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good ! 2435
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff ?)
Still, the right grain is proper to right race ;
What 's contrary, call curious accident !
Hold by the usual ! Orchard-grafted tree, 2440
Not wilding, race-horse-sired, not rouncey-born,
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob !
Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,
Frailty,—mere youthfulness that 's all at fault,— 2445
Advanced to Perikles and something more ?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

—Being at least our duly born and bred,—
 Curse on what chaunoproct first gained his ear
 And got his . . . well, once true man in right
 place,
 Our commonalty soon content themselves 2450
 With doing just what they are born to do,
 Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs
 And leave state-business to the larger brain.
 I do not stickle for their punishment ;
 But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch, 2455
 A purse to pay the piper : flog, say I,
 Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,
 Who choose to play the important ! Far from
 side
 With us, their natural supports, allies,—
 And, best by brain, help who are best by birth 2460
 To fortify each weak point in the wall
 Built broad and wide and deep for permanence
 Between what 's high and low, what 's rare and
 vile,—
 They cast their lot perversely in with low
 And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob 2465
 To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.
 And then, simplicity become conceit,—
 Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,
 Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims,—
 These must be taught next how to use their heads 2470
 And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule !
 What fellows thus inflame the multitude ?
 Your Sokrates, still crying ' Understand !'
 Your Aristullos,—' Argue !' Last and worst,
 Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate, 2475
 Remember there 's degree in heaven and earth,
 Cry ' Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,
 And Sophokles advised respect the kings !'
 Why, your Euripides informs them—' Gods ?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

They are not ! Kings ? They are, but . . . do
 not I, 2480
 In Suppliants, make my Theseus,—yours, no
 more,—

Fire up at insult of who styles him King ?
 Play off that Herald, I despise the most,
 As patronizing kings' prerogative
 Against a Theseus proud to dare no step 2485
 Till he consult the people ?'

" Such as these—

Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight ?
 Nowise, Balaustion ! All my roundabout
 Ends at beginning, with my own defence.
 I dose each culprit just with—Comedy. 2490

Let each be doctored in exact the mode
 Himself prescribes : by words, the word-monger—
 My words to his words,—my lies, if you like,
 To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,
 Quack, necromancer ; Aristullos,—say, 2495

Male Kirké who bewitches and bewrays
 And changes folk to swine ; Euripides,—
 Well, I acknowledge ! Every word is false,
 Looked close at ; but stand distant and stare
 through,

All 's absolute indubitable truth 2500
 Behind lies, truth which only lies declare !
 For come, concede me truth 's in thing not word,
 Meaning not manner ! Love smiles 'rogue' and
 'wretch'

When 'sweet' and 'dear' seem vapid : Hate adopts
 Love's 'sweet' and 'dear' when 'rogue' and
 'wretch' fall flat : 2505

Love, Hate—are truths, then, each, in sense not
 sound.

Further : if Love, remaining Love, fell back

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

On 'sweet' and 'dear,'—if Hate, though Hate the
 same,
 Dropped down to 'rogue' and 'wretch,'—each
 phrase were false.

Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom 2510
 With reason: I must therefore fight my foe,
 Finish the mischief which made enmity.
 How? By employing means to most hurt him.
 Who much harmed me. What way did he do
 harm?

Through word or deed? Through word? with
 word, wage war! 2515

Word with myself directly? As direct
 Reply shall follow: word to you, the wise,
 Whence indirectly came the harm to me?
 What wisdom I can muster waits on such.

Word to the populace which, misconceived 2520
 By ignorance and incapacity,
 Ends in no such effect as follows cause
 When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,
 So damages what I and you hold dear?

In that event, I ply the populace 2525
 With just such word as leavens their whole lump
 To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*
 Arbitrate properly between us both?

They weigh my answer with his argument,
 Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence? 2530
 All they attain to understand is—blank!
 Two adversaries differ: which is right
 And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,
 Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!

Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole, 2535
 They fall a-laughing! Add,—his household
 drudge
 Of all-work justifies that office well,
 Kisses the wife, composing him the play,—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,
 And go off—' Was he such a sorry scrub ? 2540
 This other seems to know ! we praised too fast !'
 Why then, my lies have done the work of truth,
 Since ' scrub,' improper designation, means
 Exactly what the proper argument
 —Had such been comprehensible—proposed 2545
 To proper audience—were I graced with such—
 Would properly result in ; so your friend
 Gets an impartial verdict on his verse
 'The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn!'

" There, my Balaustion ! All is summed and said. 2550
 No other cause of quarrel with yourself !
 Euripides and Aristophanes
 Differ : he needs must round our difference
 Into the mob's ear ; with the mob I plead.
 You angrily start forward ' This to me ? ' 2555
 No speck of this on you the thrice refined !
 Could parley be restricted to us two,
 My first of duties were to clear up doubt
 As to our true divergence each from each.
 Does my opinion so diverge from yours ? 2560
 Probably less than little—not at all !
 To know a matter, for my very self
 And intimates—that 's one thing ; to imply
 By ' knowledge '—loosing whatsoe'er I know
 Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake, 2565
 May brain themselves and me in consequence,—
 That 's quite another. ' O the daring flight !
 This only bard maintains the exalted brow,
 Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods !'
 Did I fear—I play superstitious fool, 2570
 Who, with the due proviso, introduced,
 Active and passive, their whole company
 As creatures too absurd for scorn itself ?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Zeus? I have styled him—'slave, mere thrashing-block!'

I'll tell you : in my very next of plays, 2575

At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honour, full

In front of Bacchos' representative,

I mean to make main-actor—Bacchos' self!

Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,

A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief, 2580

Demonstrated all these by his own mere

Xanthias the man-slave : such man shows such god

Shamed to brute-beastship by comparison!

And when ears have their fill of his abuse,

And eyes are sated with his pummelling,— 2585

My Choros taking care, by, all the while,

Singing his glory, that men recognize

A god in the abused and pummelled beast,—

Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,

Should one spectator shut revolted eye,— 2590

Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice

'Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!

Does not most license hallow best our day,

And least decorum prove its strictest rite?

Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool, 2595

And there's no fooling like a majesty

Mocked at,—who mocks the god, obeys the law—

Law which, impute but indiscretion to,

And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides

Is evidently active in the world! 2600

Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!

See Hermes! what commotion raged,—reflect!—

When imaged god alone got injury

By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared

Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit,— 2605

Ever the last the longest! At this hour,

The craze abates a little; so, my Play

Shall have up Hermes : and a Karion, slave,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

(Since there 's no getting lower) calls our friend
The profitable god, we honour so, 2610
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth—
Bids him go earn more honest livelihood
By washing tripe in well-trough—wash he does,
Duly obedient ! Have I dared my best ?
Asklepios, answer !—deity in vogue, 2615
Who visits Sophokles familiarly,
If you believe the old man,—at his age,
Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door
Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times
When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched,— 2620
At any rate, to memorize the fact,
He has spent money, set an altar up
In the god's temple, now in much repute.
That temple-service trust me to describe—
Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls, 2625
Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts
' And consecrate the same into a bag,'
For whimsies done away with in the dark !
As if, a stone's throw from that theatre
Whereon I thus unmask their dupery, 2630
The thing were not religious and august !

“ Of Sophokles himself—nor word nor sign
Beyond a harmless parody or so !
He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,
But, living, lets live, the good easy soul 2635
Who,—if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,
Loves wine and—never mind what other sport,
Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,
Proves but queer captain when the people claim,
For one who conquered with ' Antigone,' 2640
The right to undertake a squadron's charge,—
And needs the son's help now to finish plays,
Seeing his dotage calls for governance

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And Iophon to share his property,—
 Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe 2645
 Not one word—true or false, I like the man.
 Sophokles lives and lets live : long live he !
 Otherwise,—sharp the scourge and hard the blow !

“ And what 's my teaching but—accept the old,
 Contest the strange ! acknowledge work that 's done, 2650
 Misdoubt men who have still their work to do !
 Religions, laws and customs, poetries,
 Are old ? So much achieved victorious truth !
 Each work was product of a life-time, wrung
 From each man by an adverse world : for why ? 2655
 He worked, destroying other older work
 Which the world loved and so was loth to lose.
 Whom the world beat in battle—dust and ash !
 Who beat the world, left work in evidence,
 And wears its crown till new men live new lives, 2660
 And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.
 I mean to show you on the stage : you 'll see
 My Just Judge only venture to decide
 Between two suitors, which is god, which man,
 By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear. 2665
 You shall agree,—whichever bellows first,
 He 's human ; who holds longest out, divine :
 That is the only equitable test.
 Cruelty ? Pray, who pricked them on to court
 My thong's award ? Must they needs dominate ? 2670
 Then I—rebel. Their instinct grasps the new ?
 Mine bids retain the old : a fight must be,
 And which is stronger the event will show.
 O but the pain ! Your proved divinity
 Still smarts all reddened ? And the rightlier served ! 2675
 Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all ?
 Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment
 There 's nature common to both gods and men !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

All of them—spirit? What so winced was clay.
 Away pretence to some exclusive sphere 2680
 Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few
 Fume-fed with self-superiority!
 I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay
 Existence,—stamp and ramp with heel and hoof
 On solid vulgar life, you fools disown. 2685
 Make haste from your unreal eminence,
 And measure lengths with me upon that ground
 Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!
 I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends
 And how it drops apace and dies away. 2690
 I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match.
 I too can lead an airy life when dead,
 Fly like Kinesias when I 'm cloudward bound;
 But here, no death shall mix with life it mars.

“So, my old enemy who caused the fight, 2695
 Own I have beaten you, Euripides!
 Or,—if your advocate would contravene,—
 Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!
 I have not done my utmost,—treated you
 As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed,— 2700
 Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!
 Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment
 Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist
 Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!
 Fancy yourself my Aristonumos, 2705
 Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!
 Three cuckoos who cry ‘cuckoo’! much I care!
 They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*”

Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?
 Day by day glides our galley on its path: 2710
 Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,

ARISTOPHANES APOLOGY

And still, my patient scribe ! no sunset's peace
 Descends more punctual than that brow's incline
 O'er tablets which your serviceable hand
 Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth, 2715
 These relics of a night that make me rich,
 But, half-remembered merely, leave so poor
 Each stranger to Athenai and her past ?
 For—how remembered ! As some greedy hind*
 Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due, 2720
 To yield its hoarding,—heedless what alloy
 Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold
 Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity,—
 So would you fain relieve of load this brain,
 Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with
 strength, 2725
 What words and weakness, strength's receptacle—
 Wax from the store ! Yet,—aching soothed away,—
 Accept the compound ! No suspected scent
 But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost
 Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh. 2730
 No need of farther squeezing. What remains
 Can only be Balaustion, just her speech.

Ah, but—because speech serves a purpose still !—

He ended with that flourish. I replied,

Fancy myself your Aristonumos ? 2735
 Advise me, rather, to remain myself,
 Balaustion,—mindful what mere mouse confronts
 The forest-monarch Aristophanes !
 I who, a woman, claim no quality
 Beside the love of all things loveable 2740
 Created by a power pre-eminent
 In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

—You, the consummately-creative ! How
Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust
To any process aiming at result 2745
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with ?
Result, all judge : means, let none scrutinize
Save those aware how glory best is gained
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,
Constant in faith that only good works good, 2750
While evil yields no fruit but impotence !
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means.
Nay, if result itself in turn become
Means,—who shall say?—to ends still loftier yet,—
Though still the good prove hard to understand, 2755
The bad still seemingly predominate,—
Never may I forget which order bears
The burden, toils to win the great reward,
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield ! 2760
Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil
From what may prove man's-work permissible,
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise : what then ?
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash
Of thorn and bramble, ere those shrubs, those
flowers, 2765
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,
Are sown, matured and garlanded for boys
And girls, who know not how the growth was
gained.
Finally, am I not a foreigner ?
No born and bred Athenian,—isled about, 2770
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,
Just some particular doctrine which may best
Explain the strange thing I revolt against—
How—by involvement, who may extricate?—
Religion perks up through impiety, 2775
Law leers with licence, folly wise-like frowns,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The seemly lurks inside the abominable.
 But opposites,—each neutralizes each
 Haply by mixture : what should promise death,
 May haply give the good ingredient force, 2780
 Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.
 This institution, therefore,—Comedy,—
 By origin, a rite,—by exercise,
 Proved an achievement tasking poet's power
 To utmost, eking legislation out 2785
 Beyond the legislator's faculty,
 Playing the censor where the moralist
 Declines his function, far too dignified
 For dealing with minute absurdities :
 By efficacy,—virtue's guard, the scourge 2790
 Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid
 Of all that 's righteous, customary, sound
 And wholesome; sanctioned therefore,—better say,
 Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age
 By, not alone the long recorded roll 2795
 Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day—
 (The multitude as prompt recipient still
 Of good gay teaching from that monitor
 They crowned this morning—Aristophanes—
 As when Sousarion's car first traversed street) 2800
 This product of Athenai—I dispute,
 Impugn? There 's just one only circumstance
 Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel ;
 But eyes, ears, senses prove me—foreigner !
 Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest 2805
 Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side
 Of—larger than your stage—life's spectacle,
 Convention here permits and there forbids
 Impulse and action, nor alleges more
 Than some mysterious "So do all, and so 2810
 Does no one : " which the hasty stranger blames
 Because, who bends the head unquestioning,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,
 By failure of a reference to law
 Beyond convention ; blames unjustly, too— 2815
 As if, through that defect, all gained were lost
 And slave-brand set on brow indelibly ;—
 Blames unobservant or experienceless
 That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,
 Show stem no more affected at the root 2820
 By bough's exceptional submissive dip
 Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray
 To windy fitfulness in wayward sport—
 No more lie prostrate—than low files of flower
 Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise 2825
 Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck
 Of thorn and thistle that refractory
 Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.
 Why shall not guest extend like charity,
 Conceive how,—even when astounded most 2830
 That natives seem to acquiesce in muck
 Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold,—
 Such may still bring to test, still bear away
 Safely and surely much of good and true
 Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, un-
 spoiled ? 2835
 Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass
 A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame :
 And who has read your|Lemnians, seen The Hours,
 Heard Female-Playhouse-seat-Preoccupants,
 May feel no worse effect than, once a year, 2840
 Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags
 And play the mendicant, conform thereby
 To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint
 Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.
 What if I share the stranger's weakness then ? 2845
 Well, could I also show his strength, his sense
 Untutored, ay !—but then untampered with !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

I fancy, though the world seems old enough,
 Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,
 Years may conduct to such extreme of age, 2850
 And outside Hellas so isles new may lurk,
 That haply,—when and where remain a dream !—
 In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,
 In novel lands as strange where, all the same,
 Their men and women yet behold, as we, * 2855
 Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope
 and fear,
 Over again, unhelped by Attiké—
 Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,
 Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance
 Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard 2860
 To metal—ay, those Kassiterides !
 Then asks : “ Ye apprehend the human form.
 What of this statue, made to Pheidias' mind,
 This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint ?
 Ye too feel truth, love beauty : judge of these ! ” 2865
 Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like :
 “ Each hair too indistinct—for, see our own !
 Hands, not skin-coloured as these hands we have,
 And lo, the want of due decorum here !
 A citizen, arrayed in civic garb, 2870
 Just as he walked your streets apparently,
 Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,
 In thronged Athenai ! foolish painter's-freak !
 While here 's his brother-sculptor found at fault
 Still more egregiously, who shames the world, 2875
 Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,
 Atrociously exposed from head to foot !
 Sure, the Immortal would impart at once
 Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths
 suppressed
 Conduce to the far greater truth's display,— 2880
 Would replace simple by instructed sense,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And teach them how Athenai first so tamed
 The natural fierceness that her progeny
 Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man :
 Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude, 2885
 Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize
 For man's mind, body, each in excellence,—
 When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,
 And only irreligion grudged the gods
 One naked glory of their master-work 2890
 Where all is glorious rightly understood,—
 The human frame ; enough that man mistakes :
 Let him not think the gods mistaken too !

But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye
 Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight ! 2895
 Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me—
 How on your faultless should I fasten fault
 Of my own framing, even ? Only say,—
 Suppose the impossible were realized,
 And some as patent incongruity, 2900
 Unseemliness,—of no more warrant, there
 And then, than now and here, whate'er the time
 And place,—I say, the Immortal—who can
 doubt ?—
 Would never shrink, but own "The blot escaped
 Our artist : thus he shows humanity." 2905

May stranger tax one peccant part in thee,
 Poet, three-parts divine ? May I proceed ?

"Comedy is prescription and a rite."
 Since when ? No growth of the blind antique time,
 "It rose in Attiké with liberty ; 2910
 When freedom falls, it too will fall." Scarce so !
 Your games,—the Olympian, Zeus gave birth to
 these ;

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Your Pythian,—these were Phoibos' institute.
 Isthmian, Nemeian,—Theseus, Herakles
 Appointed each, the boys and barbers say ! 2915
 Earth's day is growing late : where 's Comedy ?
 "Oh, that commenced an agesince,—two, belike,—
 In Megara, whence here they brought the thing !"
 Or I misunderstand, or here 's the fact—
 Your grandsire could recall that rustic song, 2920
 How suchanone was thief, and miser such
 And how,—immunity from chastisement
 Once promised to bold singers of the same
 By daylight on the drunkard's holiday,—
 The clever fellow of the joyous troop 2925
 Tried acting what before he sang about,
 Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too :
 While his companions ranged a-row, closed up
 For Choros,—bade the general rabblement
 Sit, see, hear, laugh,—not join the dance them-
 selves. 2930
 Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,
 And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,
 Still closer in approach to Tragedy,—
 So led the way to Aristophanes,
 Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire— 2935
 Chionides ; yourself wrote " Banqueters "
 When Aischulos had made " Prometheus," nay,
 All of the marvels ; Sophokles,—I 'll cite,
 " Oidipous "—and Euripides—I bend
 The head—" Medeia " henceforth awed the world ! 2940
 " Banqueters," " Babylonians "—next come you !
 Surely the great days that left Hellas free
 Happened before such advent of huge help,
 Eighty-years-late assistance ? Marathon,
 Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think, 2945
 Before new educators stood reproved,
 Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise ?
Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,
Plainly authentic, incontestably 2950
Adequate to the helpful ordinance ?
Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from
source ;

'T is there we taste the god's benign intent :
Not when,—fatigued away by journey, foul
With brutish trampling,—crystal sinks to slime, 2955
And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.
Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure ?
"Nowise !" yourself protest with vehemence ;
"Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break ;
Every successor paddled in the slush ; 2960
Nay, my contemporaries one and all
Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game ;
Then was I first to change buffoonery
For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,
Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine, 2965
Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law—
'Drop knave's-tricks, deal more neighbour-like,
ye boors !'—

With such new glory of poetic breath
As, lifting application far past use
O' the present, launched it o'er men's lowly heads 2970
To future time, when high and low alike
Are dead and done with, while my airy power
Flies disengaged, as vapour from what stuff
It—say not, dwelt in—fitlier, dallied with
To forward work, which done,—deliverance
brave,— 2975

It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.
Say then, myself invented Comedy !"

So mouths full many a famed Parabasis !
Agreed ! No more, then, of prescriptive use,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Authorization by antiquity, 2980
 For what offends our judgment ! 'T is your work,
 Performed your way : not work delivered you
 Intact, intact producible in turn.
 Everywhere have you altered old to new—
 Your will, your warrant : therefore, work must stand 2985
 Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth ?
 Its aim and object ! Peace you advocate,
 And war would fain abolish from the land :
 Support religion, lash irreverence,
 Yet laughingly administer rebuke 2990
 To superstitious folly,—equal fault !
 While innovating rashness, lust of change,
 New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,
 Make your main quarry,—“oldest” meaning
 “best.”
 You check the fretful litigation-itch, 2995
 Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,
 Punish mob-favourites ; most of all press hard
 On sophists who assist the demagogue,
 And poets their accomplices in crime.
 Such your main quarry : by the way, you strike 3000
 Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,
 Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate :
 Still with a bolt to spare when dramatist
 Proves haply unproficient in his art.
 Such aims—alone, no matter for the means— 3005
 Declare the unexampled excellence
 Of their first author—Aristophanes !

Whereat—Euripides, oh, not thyself—
 Augustlier than the need !—thy century
 Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before 3010
 “ Banqueters ” gave dark earth enlightenment,
 Or “ Babylonians ” played Prometheus here,—
 These let me summon to defend thy cause !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Lo, as indignantly took life and shape
 Labour by labour, all of Herakles,— 3015
 Palpably fronting some o'erbold pretence
 "Eurustheusslew the monsters, purged the world!"
 So shall each poem pass you and imprint
 Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised
 Peace?
 Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! "Peace" the
 theme? 3020
 "Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie,—of the blest
 Immortals beauteousest,—
 Come! for the heart within me dies away,
 So long dost thou delay!
 O I have feared lest old age, much annoy, 3025
 Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,
 Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
 The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns
 to be.
 But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
 Come to the city here! 3030
 Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,
 With Her who madly roams
 Rejoicing in the steel against the life
 That 's whetted—banish Strife!"

 Shall I proceed? No need of next and next! 3035
 That were too easy, play so presses play,
 Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,
 Each eager to confute the idle boast.
 What virtue but stands forth panegyricized,
 What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books 3040
 Which bettered Hellas,—beyond graven gold
 Or gem indenture, sung by Phoibos' self
 And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house—
 Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?
 —Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised 3045

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

By sly admixture of the blameworthy
 And enforced coupling of base fellowship,—
 Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,
 "Allow one glance on horrors—laughable!"—
 This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged 3030
 Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,
 On objects worthy either; earnestness,
 Attribute him, and power! but novelty?
 Nor his nor yours a doctrine—all the world's!
 What man of full-grown sense and sanity 3055
 Holds other than the truth,—wide Hellas
 through,—
 Though truth, he acts, discredit truth he holds?
 What imbecile has dared to formulate
 "Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!"—
 And so preach on, reverse each rule of right 3070
 Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?
 No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh
 According to heart's temper, "Peace were best,
 Except occasions when we put aside
 Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift 3085
 Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!"

"Nay," you reply; for one, whose mind withstands
 His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake
 Wants war,—you find a crowd of hypocrites
 Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and
 greed. 3090
 On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts
 Distilled like universal but thin dew
 Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,
 No doubt, to universal crop and clown,
 Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry 3095
 With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit
 The droppings to his neighbour. No! collect
 All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Which nowise need a washing, save and store
 And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout 3080
 On some one evildoer, sheltered close,—
 The fool supposed,—till you beat guard away,
 And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,
 But Lamachos absurd,—case, crests and all,—
 Not that democracy was blind of choice, 3085
 But Kleon and Huperbolos were shams :
 Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed,—
 The concrete for the abstract ; that 's the way !
 What matters Choros crying " Hence, impure !"
 You cried " Ariphrades does thus and thus !" 3090
 Now, earnestness seems never earnest more
 Than when it dons for garb—indifference ;
 So there 's much laughing : but, compensative,
 When frowning follows laughter, then indeed
 Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony !— 3095
 Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze
 From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain
 O' the commonalty—whom, unless you prick
 To purpose, what avails that finer pates
 Succumb to simple scratching? Those—not
 these— 3100
 'T is Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,
 Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,
 House over head, or, better, poisons him.
 Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,
 Club-drub the callous numskulls ! In and in 3105
 Beat this essential consequential fact
 That here they have a hater of the three,
 Who hates in word, phrase, nickname, epithet
 And illustration, beyond doubt at all !
 And similarly, would you win assent 3110
 To—Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide
 With good plain pleasure her concomitant—
 And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,
 Hare-slice-and-peasoup-season, household joy : 3115
 Theoria's beautiful belongings match
 Opora's lavish condescendings : brief,
 Since here the people are to judge, you press
 Such argument as people understand :
 If with exaggeration—what care you ? 3120

Have I misunderstood you in the main ?
 No ! then must answer be, such argument,
 Such policy, no matter what good love
 Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,
 Useless and null : henceforward intercepts 3125
 Sober effective blow at what you blame,
 And renders nugatory rightful praise
 Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed—
 What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark ?
 Blame ? You curse, rather, till who blames must
 blush— 3130

Lean to apology or praise, more like !
 Docs garment, simpered o'er as white, prove grey ?
 " Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black
 Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black,"
 You bawl, till men sigh " nearer snowiness ! " 3135
 What follows ? What one faint-rewarding fall
 Of foe belaboured ne'er so lustily ?
 Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart ?
 He died, commanding, " hero," say yourself !
 Gibe Nikias into privacy ?—nay, shake 3140
 Kleon a little from his arrogance
 By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds ? I think,
 He ruled his life long and, when time was ripe,
 Died fighting for amusement,—good tough hide !
 Sokrates still goes up and down the streets, 3145
 And Aristullos puts his speech in book,
 When both should be abolished long ago.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Nay, wretchedest of rags, Aripgrades—
You have been fouling that redoubtable
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect? 3150
Still he strums on, strums ever cheerily,
And earns his wage,—“Who minds a joke?”
men say.

No, friend! The statues stand—mudstained at
most—

Titan or pygmy : what achieves their fall
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent, 3155
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning—truth!

Your praise, then—honey-smearing helps your
friend,
More than blame's ordure-smirch hurts foe, per-
haps?

Peace, now, misunderstood, ne'er prized enough,
You have interpreted to ignorance 3160
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,
And for the first time knows Peace means the power
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,
Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw, 3165
Peace sits at cosy feast with lamp and fire,
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling
gay.

How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates 3170
To give Peace, over War, the preference?
Ah, friend—had this indubitable fact
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!
It cannot be that even his few wits 3175
Were addled to the point that, so advised,
Preposterous he had answered—“Cakes are prime,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have
 worth,
 And yet—for country's sake, to save our gods
 Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs, 3180
 Save wife and child and home and liberty,—
 I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow—nay,
 starve,
 If need were,—and by much prefer the choice !*
 Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,
 Has been—who served precisely for your butt— 3185
 Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away
 On battle-ground ; cried “Cake my buckler be,
 Embossed with cream-clot ! peace, not war, I
 choose,
 Holding with Dikaiopolis !” Comedy
 Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent, 3190
 When Miltiades shall next shirk Marathon,
 Themistokles swap Salamis for—cake,
 And Kimon grunt “Peace, grant me dancing-
 girls !”
 But sooner, hardly ! twenty-five years since,
 The war began,—such pleas for Peace have reached 3195
 A reasonable age. The end shows all.
 And so with all the rest you advocate !
 “Wise folk leave litigation ! ’ware the wasps !
 Whoso loves law and lawyers, heliast-like,
 Wants hemlock !” None shows that so funnily. 3200
 But, once cure madness, how comports himself
 Your sane exemplar, what ’s our gain thereby ?
 Philokleon turns Bdelukleon ! just this change,—
 New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,
 Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk, 3205
 Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth
 With his own son who cured his father’s cold
 By making him catch fever—funnily !
 But as for curing love of lawsuits—faugh !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And how does new improve upon the old 3210
 —Your boast—in even abusing? Rough, may be—
 Still, honest was the old mode. “Call thief—thief!”
 But never call thief even—murderer!
 Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit
 Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your
 brains 3215
 For adequate invective,—cut the life
 Clean out each quality,—but load your lash
 With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!
 Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,
 Inculcate foul deeds? There 's the fault to flog! 3220
 You vow “The rascal cannot read nor write,
 Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,
 Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,
 His uncle deals in crockery, and last,—
 Himself 's a stranger!” That 's the cap and crown 3225
 Of stinging-nettle, that 's the master-stroke!
 What poet-rival,—after “housebreaker,”
 “Fish-gorging,” “midnight footpad” and so
 forth,—
 Proves not, beside, “a stranger”? Chased from
 charge
 To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court,— 3230
 Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource—
 All, from Kratinos downward—“strangers” they!
 Pity the trick 's too facile! None so raw
 Among your playmates but have caught the ball
 And sent it back as briskly to—yourself! 3235
 You too, my Attic, are styled “stranger”—Rhodes,
 Aigina, Lindos or Kameiros,—nay,
 'T was Egypt reared, if Eupolis be right,
 Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)
 Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self 3240
 Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled
 My poet into court, and o'er the coals

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Hauled and re-hauled "the stranger,—insolent,
 Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!"
 Why must you Comics one and all take stand 3245
 On lower ground than truth from first to last?
 Why all agree to let folk disbelieve,
 So laughter but reward a funny lie?
 Repel such onslaughts—answer, sad and grave,
 Your fancy-fleerings—who would stoop so low? 3250
 Your own adherents whisper,—when disgust
 Too menacingly thrills Logeion through
 At—Perikles invents this present war
 Because men robbed his mistress of three maids—
 Or—Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head,— 3255
 "What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?
 Our poet means no mischief! All should know—
 Ribaldry here implies a compliment!
 He deals with things, not men,—his men are
 things—
 Each represents a class, plays figure-head 3260
 And names the ship: no meaner than the first
 Would serve; he styles a trireme 'Sokrates'—
 Fears 'Sokrates' may prove unseaworthy
 (That's merely—'Sophists are the bane of boys')
 Rat-riddled ('they are capable of theft'), 3265
 Rotten or whatsoe'er shows ship-disease,
 ('They war with gods and worship whirligig').
 You never took the joke for earnest? scarce
 Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,
 And Sokrates—the whole fraternity?" 3270

This then is Comedy, our sacred song,
 Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure:
 Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,
 Which, born a twin with public liberty,
 Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane! 3275
 Liberty? what so exquisitely framed

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And fitted to suck dry its life of life
 To last faint fibre?—since that life is truth.
 You who profess your indignation swells
 At sophistry, when specious words confuse 3280
 Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say—
 (Though all that 's done is—dare veracity,
 Show that the true conception of each deed
 Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, "wrong" or "right,"
 Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold, 3285
 But, change your side, shoots light, where dark
 alone
 Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)
 You who put sophistry to shame, and shout
 "There 's but a single side to man and thing ;
 A side so much more big than thing or man 3290
 Possibly can be, that—believe 't is true ?
 Such were too marvellous simplicity !"—
 Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,
 (—Abide by your own painting !) what they teach,
 They wish at least their pupil to believe, 3295
 And, what believe, to practise ! Did *you* wish
 Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in hand,
 And fire the horrid Speculation-shop ?
 Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob
 What man was your so monstrous Sokrates ; 3300
 Himself received amusement, why not they ?
 Just as did Kleon first play magistrate
 And bid you put your birth in evidence—
 Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here
 To shame us all when foreign guests may mock— 3305
 Then,—birth established, fooling licensed you,—
 He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,
 Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,
 Kukloboros-roaring, and the camel-rest.
 Nay, Aristullos,—once your volley spent 3310
 On the male-Kirké and her swinish crew,—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

PLATON,—so others call the youth we love,—
 Sends your performance to the curious king—
 “Do you desire to know Athenai’s knack
 At turning seriousness to pleasantry? 3315
 Read this! One Aristullos means myself.
 The author is indeed a merry grig!”
 Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent
 On laying down the law “Tell lies I must—
 Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!” 3320
 When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage
 “Here you behold the King of Comedy—
 Me, who, the first, have purged my every picce
 From each and all my predecessors’ filth,
 Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid 3325
 The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one
 Least sample but would make my hair turn grey
 Beyond a twelvemonth’s ravage! I renounce
 Mountebank-claptrap, such as firework-fizz
 And torchflare, or else nuts and barleycorns 3330
 Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for
 And stop their mouths with; no such stuff shames
 me!
 Who,—what ’s more serious,—know both when
 to strike
 And when to stay my hand: once dead, my foe,
 Why, done, my fighting! / attack a corpse? 3335
 I spare the corpse-like even! punish age?
 I pity from my soul that sad effete
 Toothless old mumblor called Kratinos! once
 My rival,—now, alack, the dotard slinks
 Ragged and hungry to what hole ’s his home; 3340
 Ay, slinks thro’ byways where no passenger
 Flings him a bone to pick. You formerly
 Adored the Muses’ darling: dotard now,
 Why, he may starve! O mob most mutable!”
 So you harangued in person; while,—to point 3345

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Precisely out, these were but lies you launched,—
 Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,
 No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,
 Full-fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,
 And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh ; 3350
 While daft Kratinos—home to hole trudged he,
 Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,
 Décanted them to “ Bottle,”—beat, next year,—
 “ Bottle ” and dregs—your best of “ Clouds ” and
 dew !

Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect 3355
 Improvement on your predecessors' work
 Except in lying more audaciously ?

Why—genius ! That 's the grandeur, that 's the
 gold—

That 's *you*—superlatively true to touch—
 Gold, leaf or lump—gold, anyhow the mass 3360
 Takes manufacture and proves Pallas' casque
 Or, at your choice, simply a cask to keep
 Corruption from decay. Your rivals' hoard
 May ooze forth, lacking such preservative :
 Yours cannot—gold plays guardian far too well ! 3365
 Genius, I call *you* : dross, your rivals share ;
 Ay, share and share alike, too ! says the world,
 However you pretend supremacy
 In aught beside that gold, your very own.
 Satire ? “ Kratinos for our satirist ! ” 3370

The world cries. Elegance ? “ Who elegant
 As Eupolis ? ” resounds as noisily.
 Artistic fancy ? Choros-creatures quaint ?
 Magnes invented “ Birds ” and “ Frogs ” enough,
 Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied, 3375
 To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.
 Moral invective ? Eupolis exposed
 “ That prating beggar, he who stole the cup, ”

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Before your "Clouds" rained grime on Sokrates ;
 Nay, what beat "Clouds" but "Konnos," muck
 for mud ? 3380
 Courage ? How long before, well-masked, you
 poured
 Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,
 Did Telekleides and Hermippos pelt
 Their Perikles and Kimon ? standing forth,
 Bareheaded, not safe crouched behind a name,— 3385
 Philonides or else Kallistratos,
 Put forth, when danger threatened,—mask for face,
 To bear the brunt,—if blame fell, take the blame,—
 If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes
 "They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!" 3390
 Rather, I see all true improvements, made
 Or making, go against you—tooth and nail
 Contended with ; 't is still Moruchides,
 'T is Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,
 Argurrhios and Kinesias,—common sense 3395
 And public shame, these only cleanse your styel
 Coerced, prohibited,—you grin and bear,
 And, soon as may be, hug to heart again
 The banished nastiness too dear to drop !
 Krates could teach and practise festive song 3400
 Yet scorn scurrility ; as gay and good,
 Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,
 Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more ?
 Did your particular self advance in aught,
 Task the sad genius—steady slave the while— 3405
 To further—say, the patriotic aim ?
 No, there 's deterioration manifest
 Year by year, play by play ! survey them all,
 From that boy's triumph when "Acharnes" dawned,
 To "Thesmophoriazousai,"—this man's shame ! 3410
 There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent
 Allowed friends' plea perhaps : the baser stuff

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle.
 Who would imprison, unvolatilize
 A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils 3415
 Essence too fugitive in flower alone ;
 So, calling unguent—violet, call the play—
 Obscenity impregnated with "Peace" !
 But here 's the boy grown bald, and here 's the
 play
 With twenty years' experience: where 's one spice 3420
 Of odour in the hog's-lard ? what pretends
 To aught except a grease-pot's quality ?
 Friend, sophist-hating ! know,—worst sophistry
 Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,
 Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads 3425
 "I detail sin to shame its author"—not
 "I shame Aripgrades for sin's display" !
 "I show Opora to commend Sweet Home"—
 Not "I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake !"

Yet all the same—O genius and O gold— 3430
 Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use
 Worthy the temple, to do copper's work
 And coat a swine's trough—which abundantly
 Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne !
 Had you, I dream, discarding all the base, 3435
 The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch
 And ward against invading decency
 Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,
 And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,
 Made Comedy and Tragedy combine, 3440
 Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,
 Euripides with Aristophanes
 Coöperant ! this, reproducing Now
 As that gave Then existence : Life to-day,
 This, as that other—Life dead long ago ! 3445
 The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

But—why call crowning the reward of quest ?
Tell him, my other poet,—where thou walk'st
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed !

But dream goes idly in the air. To earth ! 3450
Earth's question just amounts to—which succeeds,
Which fails of two life-long antagonists ?
Suppose my charges all mistake ! assume
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best—
The only ! you and he, a patriot-pair, 3455
Have striven alike for one result—say, Peace !
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters—
Our people : have you made them end this war
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies
And postures of Opora ? Sadly—No ! 3460
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,
May yet endure until Athenai falls,
And freedom falls with her. So much for you !
Now, the antagonist Euripides—
Has he succeeded better ? Who shall say ? 3465
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd
To a dim future, and if there he fail,
Why, you are fellows in adversity.
But that 's unlike the fate of wise words launched
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart, 3470
Arrive, Glad Welcome ! Not my single wish—
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,
Your nature too is kingly. All beside
I call pretension—no true potentate,
Whatever intermediary be crowned, 3475
Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky
Lacks not Triballo to complete the group.
I recognize,—behind such phantom-crew,—
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,
Else never had I dared approach, appeal 3480
To poetry, power, Aristophanes !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,
 Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign
 More or less royally—may prayer but push
 His sway past limit, purge the false from true ! 3485
 Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue
 But that the other king stands suddenly,
 In all the grand investiture of death,
 Bowing your knee beside my lowly head—
 Equals one moment !

Now, arise and go ! 3490

Both have done homage to Euripides !

Silence pursued the words : till he broke out—

“ Scarce so ! This constitutes, I may believe,
 Sufficient homage done by who defames
 Your poet's foe, since you account me such ; 3495
 But homage-proper,—pay it by defence
 Of him, direct defence and not oblique,
 Not by mere mild admonishment of me ! ”

Defence ? The best, the only ! I replied.
 A story goes—When Sophokles, last year, 3500
 Cited before tribunal by his son
 (A poet—to complete the parallel)
 Was certified unsound of intellect,
 And claimed as only fit for tutelage,
 Since old and doating and incompetent 3505
 To carry on this world's work,—the defence
 Consisted just in his reciting (calm
 As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell
 And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)
 That choros-chant “ The station of the steed, 3510
 Stranger ! thou comest to,—Kolonos white ! ”
 Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

You know the one adventure of my life—
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell, 3515
"I sang another 'Herakles,'" smiled he;
"It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!
Take it—the tablets also where I traced
The story first with stulos pendent still—
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift, 3520
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,
Yourself shall modulate—same notes, same
strings—
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once."
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,
We were about to honour him once more 3525
By reading the consummate Tragedy.
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;
May I go on, and read,—so make defence,
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,
—Beating the god, affords such test: / hold 3530
That when rash hands but touch divinity,
The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,
And—fire—he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we
try?

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.

HERAKLES

AMPHITRUON

Zeus' Couchmate,—who of mortals knows not me, 3535
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaios sired
Of old, as Perseus him, I—Herakles?
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike
Of Sown-ones burgeoned : Ares saved from these
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day 3540
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,
King of the country,—Kreon that became
The father of this woman, Megara,
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all 3545
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,
While to my dwelling that grand Herakles
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes—where I
Abode perforce—this Megara and those
Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son 3550
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,
Kuklopiian city, which I fly, myself,
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so
To ease away my hardships and once more
Inhabit his own land, for my return 3555
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there—
The letting in of light on this choked world !
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.
The other labours—why, he toiled them through ; 3560
But for this last one—down by Tainaros,
Its mouth, to Haides' realm descended he

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

To drag into the light the three-shaped hound
 Of Hell : whence Herakles returns no more.
 Now, there 's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have, 3565
 How Dirké's husband was a Lukos once,
 Holding the seven-towered city here in sway
 Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,
 The twins Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus.
 This Lukos' son,—named like his father too, • 3570
 No born Kadmeian but Euboia's gift,—
 Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,
 Falling upon our town sedition-sick.
 To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond
 Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly ; 3575
 For, since my son is in the earth's abysses,
 This man of valour, Lukos, lord and king,
 Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,
 And slay his wife as well,—by murder thus
 Thinking to stamp out murder,—slay too me, 3580
 (If me 't is fit you count among men still,—
 Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,
 Grown men one day, exact due punishment
 Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.
 I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes, 3585
 The children's household guardian,—left, when
 earth's
 Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine,—
 I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,
 Sit at this altar of the saviour Zeus
 Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised 3590
 Conquering—my nobly-born !—the Minuai.
 Here do we guard our station, destitute
 Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground
 Couched side by side : sealed out of house and
 home
 Sit we in a resourcelessness of help. 3595
 Our friends—why, some are no true friends, I see !

HERAKLES

The rest, that are true, want the means to aid.
So operates in man adversity :
Whereof may never anybody—no,
Though half of him should really wish me well,— 3600
Happen to taste ! a friend-test faultless, that !

MEGARA

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,
Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,
Of speared Kadmeians—how gods play men false !
I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire, 3605
Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,
Having supreme rule,—for the love of which
Leap the long lances forth at favoured breasts,—
And having children too : and me he gave
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles 3610
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.
And now these things are dead and flown away,
While thou and I await our death, old man,
These Herakleian boys too, whom—my chicks—
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird. 3615
But one or other falls to questioning
“O mother,” cries he, “where in all the world
Is father gone to ? What ’s he doing ? when
Will he come back ?” At fault through tender
years,
They seek their sire. For me, I put them off, 3620
Telling them stories ; at each creak of doors,
All wonder “Does he come ?”—and all a-foot
Make for the fall before the parent knee.
Now then, what hope, what method of escape
Facilitatest thou ?—for, thee, old man, 3625
I look to,—since we may not leave by stealth
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong
Than we, are at the outlets : nor in friends
Remain to us the hopes of safety more.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Therefore, whatever thy decision be, 3630
Impart it for the common good of all !
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

AMPHITRUON

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass. 3635

MEGARA

You want some sorrow more, or so love life ?

AMPHITRUON

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

MEGARA

And I ; but hope against hope—no, old man !

AMPHITRUON

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.

MEGARA

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites. 3640

AMPHITRUON

O there may be a run before the wind
From out these present ills, for me and thee,
Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse !
But hush ! and from the children take away
Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm, 3645
Steal them by stories—sad theft, all the same !
For, human troubles—they grow weary too ;
Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength
Nor happy men keep happy to the end :
Since all things change—their natures part in
twain ; 3650

HERAKLES

And that man's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,
Hopes ever : to despair is coward-like.

CHOROS

These domes that overroof,
This long-used couch, I come to, having made
A staff my prop, that song may put to proof 3655
The swan-like power, age-whitened,—poet's aid
Of sobbed-forth dirges—words that stand aloof
From action now : such am I—just a shade
With night for all its face, a mere night-dream—
And words that tremble too : howe'er they seem, 3660
Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,
O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns—
Unhappy mother—only us above,
Nor reaches him below in Haides' realm, thy love! 3665
—(Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and
limb

Way-weary, nor lose courage—as some horse
Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him
Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course !
Take by the hand, the peplos, anyone 3670
Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordone !
Aged, assist along me aged too,
Who,—mate with thee in toils when life was
new,

And shields and spears first made acquaintance-
ship,—
Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip 3675
Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.)—
See now, how like the sire's
Each eyeball fiercely fires !
What though ill-fortune have not left his race ?
Neither is gone the grand paternal grace ! 3680

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Hellas ! O what—what combatants, destroyed
In these, wilt thou one day seek—seek, and find
all void !

Pause ! for I see the ruler of this land,
Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

LUKOS

The Herakleian couple—father, wife— 3685
If needs I must, I question : “ must ” forsooth ?
Being your master—all I please, I ask.
To what time do you seek to spin out life ?
What hope, what help see, so as not to die ?
Is it you trust the sire of these, that 's sunk 3690
In Haides, will return ? How past the pitch,
Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe—
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son ;
And thou, that thou wast styled our best man's wife ! 3695
Where was the awful in his work wound up,
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake
Or the Nemeian monster whom he snared
And—says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew ?
With these do you outwrestle me ? Such feats 3700
Shall save from death the sons of Herakles
Who got praise, being nought, for bravery
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank ?
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,
Not he, nor get in spear's reach ! bow he bore— 3705
True coward's-weapon : shoot first and then fly !
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,
But who keeps rank,—stands, one unwinking stare
As, ploughing up, the darts come,—brave is he.
My action has no impudence, old man ! 3710
Providence, rather : for I own I slew
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.

HERAKLES

Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown up,
Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

AMPHITRUON

As to the part of Zeus in his own child, 3715
Let Zeus defend that ! As to mine, 't is me
The care concerns to show by argument
The folly of this fellow,—Herakles,
Whom I stand up for ! since to hear thee styled—
Cowardly—that is unendurable. 3720
First then, the infamous (for I account
Amongst the words denied to human speech,
Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles !)
This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.
Zeus' thunder I appeal to, those four steeds 3725
Whereof he also was the charioteer
When, having shot down the earth's Giant-
growth—
(Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)
Triumph he sang in common with the gods.
The Kentaur-race, four footed insolence— 3730
Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of kings,
Whom they would pick out and pronounce best man,
If not my son, “ the seeming-brave,” say'st thou !
But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,
Question her, and she would not praise, I think ! 3735
For there's no spot, where having done some good,
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.
Now, that all-wise invention, archer's-gear,
Thou blamest : hear my teaching and grow sage !
A man in armour is his armour's slave, 3740
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,
He dies because his neighbours have lost heart.
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains
Of warding death off,—gone that body-guard,
His one and only ; while, whatever folk 3745

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Have the true bow-hand,—here 's the one main
good,—

Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,
Others remain wherewith the archer saves
His limbs and life, too,—stands afar and wards
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares 3750

Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself
Offers no full front to those opposite,
But keeps in thorough cover : there 's the point
That 's capital in combat—damage foe,
Yet keep a safe skin—foe not out of reach 3755

As you are ! Thus my words contrast with thine,
And such, in judging facts, our difference.

These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay ?
What have they done thee ? In a single point
I count thee wise—if, being base thyself, 3760
Thou dread'st the progeny of nobleness.

Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,
If we must die—because of fear in thee—
A death 't were fit thou suffer at our hands,
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all. 3765

If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,
Thyself, here—suffer us to leave the land,
Fugitives ! nothing do by violence,
Or violence thyself shalt undergo
When the gods' gale may chance to change for
thee ! 3770

Alas, O land of Kadmos,—for 't is thee
I mean to close with, dealing out the due
Revilement,—in such sort dost thou defend
Herakles and his children ? Herakles
Who, coming, one to all the world, against 3775
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with !
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook
Ever to keep in silence that I count

HERAKLES

Towards my son, craven of cravens—her 3780
Whom it behoved go bring the young ones here
Fire, spears, arms—in exchange for seas made safe,
And cleansings of the land—his labour's price.
But fire, spears, arms,—O children, neither Thebes
Nor Hellas has them for you ! 'T is myself, 3785
A feeble friend, ye look to : nothing now
•But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake
And force a-flicker ! Were I only young,
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew, 3790
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks
Of this insulter would I bloody so—
Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery !

CHOROS

Have not the really good folk starting-points 3795
For speech to purpose,—though rare talkers they ?

LUKOS

Say thou against us words thou towerest with !
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.
Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos
Some, and the clefts there ! Bid the woodmen fell 3800
Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside
The city, pile the altar round with logs,
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules
The land here, but 't is I, by acts like these ! 3805
As for you, old sirs, who are set against
My judgments, you shall groan for—not alone
The Herakleian children, but the fate
Of your own house beside, when faring ill
By any chance : and you shall recollect 3810
Slaves are you of a tyranny that 's mine !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

CHOROS

O progeny of earth,—whom Ares sowed
When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw—
Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,
And bloody this man's irreligious head? 3815
Who, being no Kadmeian, rules,—the wretch,—
Our easy youth : an interloper too !
But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy
Thy lordship ever ; nor my labour's fruit,—
Hand worked so hard for,—have! A curse with thee, 3820
Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize !
For never while I live shalt thou destroy
The Herakleian children : not so deep
Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord !
But we bear both of you in mind,—that thou, 3825
The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,
While he who saved it, loses every right.
I play the busybody—for I serve
My dead friends when they need friends' service
most ?
O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear 3830
And serve indeed ! in weakness dies the wish,
Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,
And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes
Where thou exuldest !—city that 's insane,
Sick through sedition and bad government, 3835
Else never had she gained for master—thee !

MEGARA

Old friends, I praise you : since a righteous wrath
For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no !
On our account in anger with your lord,
Suffer no injury ! Hear my advice, 3840
Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.
O yes, I love my children ! how not love

HERAKLES

What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to die—

Sad I esteem too ; still, the fated way
 Who stiffens him against, that man I count 3845
 Poor creature ; us, who are of other mood,
 Since we must die, behoves us meet our death
 Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh—
 To me, worse ill than dying, that ! We owe
 Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay. 3850
 Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate
 For spear-work, so that unendurable
 Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.
 And for my glorious husband, where wants he
 A witness that he would not save his boys 3855
 If touched in their good fame thereby? Since birth
 Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,
 My husband needs must be my pattern here.
 See now thy hope—how much I count thereon !
 Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light : 3860
 And, of the dead, who came from Haides back?
 But we with talk this man might mollify :
 Never ! Of all foes, fly the foolish one !
 Wise, well-bred people, make concession to !
 Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft. 3865
 Already it was in my mind—perchance
 We might beg off these children's banishment ;
 But even that is sad, involving them
 In safety, ay—and piteous poverty !
 Since the host's visage for the flying friend 3870
 Has, only one day, the sweet look, 't is said.
 Dare with us death, which waits thee, dared or no !
 We call on thine ancestral worth, old man !
 For who outlabours what the gods appoint
 Shows energy, but energy gone mad. 3875
 Since what must—none e'er makes what must
 not be.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

CHOROS

Had anyone, while yet my arms were strong,
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.
But we are nought, now; thine henceforth to see—
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates ! 3880

AMPHITRUON

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life
Stops me from dying : but I seek to save
My son his children. Vain ! I set my heart,
It seems, upon impossibility.
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat 3885
To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice !
But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate !
Slay me and this unhappy one before
The children, lest we see them—impious sight !—
Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while 3890
On mother and on father's father ! Else,
Do as thy heart inclines thee ! No resource
Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

MEGARA

And I too supplicate : add grace to grace,
And, though but one man, doubly serve us both ! 3895
Let me bestow adornment of the dead
Upon these children ! Throw the palace wide !
For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share
At least so much of wealth was once their sire's !

LUKOS

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid 3900
My servants ! Enter and adorn yourselves !
I grudge no peploi ; but when these ye wind
About your bodies,—that adornment done,—
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

HERAKLES

MEGARA

O children, follow this unhappy foot, 3905
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,
Where others have the power, are lords in truth,
Although the empty name is left us yet !

AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,
In vain I called thee father of my child ! 3910
Thou wast less friendly far than thou didst seem.
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee
The mighty god : for I have not betrayed
The Herakleian children,—whereas thou
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely 3915
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,
Another's place ; and when it comes to help
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed !
Thou art some stupid god or born unjust.

• CHOROS

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit 3920
In song to music jubilant
For all its sorrow : making shoot
His golden plectron o'er the lute,
Melodious ministrant.
And I, too, am of mind to raise, 3925
Despite the imminence of doom,
A song of joy, outpour my praise
To him—what is it rumour says ?—
Whether—now buried in the ghostly gloom
Below ground,—he was child of Zeus indeed, 3930
Or mere Amphitruon's mortal seed—
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labour's
 meed.
For, is my hero perished in the feat ?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,
These save the dead in song,—their glory-garland
meet !

3935

First, then, he made the wood
Of Zeus a solitude,
Slaying its lion-tenant ; and he spread
The tawinness behind—his yellow head
Enmuffled by the brute's, backed by that grin of
dread.

3940

The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race
He strewed with deadly bow about their place,
Slaying with winged shafts : Peneios knew,
Beauteously-eddyng, and the long tracts too
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,
And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell
Whence, having filled their hands with pine-tree
plunder,

3945

Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.
The golden-headed spot-back'd stag he slew,
That robber of the rustics : glorified
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede
Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore
For grain, exultant the dread feast before—
Of man's flesh : hideous feeders they of yore !
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow
Accomplished he such labour, toiling so
For Mukenanian tyrant ; ay, and more—
He crossed the Melian shore

3950

3955

3960

And, by the sources of Amauros, shot

3965

HERAKLES

To death that strangers'-pest
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia : not
Of fame for good to guest !

And next, to the melodious maids he came,
Inside the Hesperian court-yard : hand must aim 3970
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves,
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves
Himself all round, one spire about the same.
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived 3975
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.
And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,
At home with Atlas : and, for valour's sake,
Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry. 3980
Also, the rider-host of Amazons
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went
To conquer through the billowy Euxine once,
Having collected what an armament
Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent 3985
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase !
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still—
Go wonder there, who will !

And the ten-thousand-headed hound 3990
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake
He burned out, head by head, and cast around
His darts a poison thence,—darts soon to slake
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore
Of Erutheia. Many a running more 3995
He made for triumph and felicity,
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry
Of tears, he sailed : and there he, luckless, ends
His life completely, nor returns again.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The house and home are desolate of friends, 4000
 And where the children's life-path leads them, plain
 I see,—no step retraceable, no god
 Availing, and no law to help the lost !
 The oar of Charon marks their period,
 Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost !— 4005
 To thee, though absent, look their uttermost !

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,
 Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will
 In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,
 They would,—and I,—when warfare was to wage, 4010
 Stand by these children ; but I am bereft
 Of youth now, lone of that good genius left !

But hist, desist ! for here come these,—
 Draped as the dead go, under and over,—
 Children long since,—now hard to discover,— 4015
 Of the once so potent Herakles !
 And the loved wife dragging, in one tether
 About her feet, the boys together ;
 And the hero's aged sire comes last !
 Unhappy that I am ! Of tears which rise,— 4020
 How am I all unable to hold fast,
 Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes !

MEGARA

Be it so ! Who is priest, who butcher here
 Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath
 Of me, the miserable ? Ready, see, 4025
 The sacrifice—to lead where Haides lives !
 O children, we are led—no lovely team
 Of corpses—age, youth, motherhood, all mixed !
 O sad fate of myself and these my sons
 Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time ! 4030
 I, indeed, bore you : but for enemies

HERAKLES

I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff!
Woe 's me !
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down 4035
From what I used to hope about you once—
The expectation from your father's talk !
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to :
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow ; 4040
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,
That which himself went wearing armour-wise.
And thou wast King of Thebes—such chariots
there !
Those plains I had for portion—all for thee, 4045
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth
To thee, his boy : and into thy right hand
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos,—
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false!
And upon thee he promised to bestow 4050
Oichalia—what, with those far-shooting shafts,
He ravaged once ; and so, since three you were,
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up
To very towers, your father,—proud enough
Prognosticating, from your manliness 4055
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.
For my part, I was picking out for you
Brides, suiting each with his alliance—this
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes—
Whence, suited—as stern-cables steady ship— 4060
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!
Fortune turns round and gives us—you, the Fates
Instead of brides—me, tears for nuptial baths,
Unhappy in my hoping ! And the sire
Of your sire—he prepares the marriage-feast 4065
Befitting Haides who plays father now—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Bitter relationship ! Oh me ! which first—
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold ?
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine ?
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go ? 4070
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,
Give them you back again, a crowded tear !
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men
Dungeoned in Haides, thee—to thee I speak ! 4075
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys !
And I too perish, famed as fortunate
By mortals once, through thee ! Assist them !
Come !
But come ! though just a shade, appear to me !
For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice, 4080
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned !

AMPHITRUON

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist !
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent 4085
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough !
And yet thou hast been called and called ; in vain
I labour : for we needs must die, it seems.
Well, aged brothers—life 's a little thing ! 4090
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while !
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes,—
To save them,—but his own work done, flies off.
Witness myself, looked up to among men, 4095
Doing noteworthy deeds : when here comes fate
Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,
In one day ! Riches then and glory,—whom
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends,

HERAKLES

Farewell! the man who loved you all so much, 4100
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA

Ha!
O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON

No more than thou canst, daughter—dumb like
thee!

MEGARA

Is this he whom we heard was under ground? 4105

AMPHITRUON

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA

What do I say? what dreams insanelly view?
This is no other than thy son, old sire!
Here children! hang to these paternal robes,
Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here's your
true 4110
Zeus that can save—and every whit as well!

HERAKLES

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula,—
How glad I see thee as I come to light!
Ha, what means this? My children I behold
Before the house in garments of the grave, 4115
Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,
My very wife—my father weeping too,
Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take
My station nearer these and learn it all!
Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home? 4120

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

MEGARA

O dearest ! light flashed on thy father now !
Art thou come ? art thou saved and dost thou fall
On friends in their supreme extremity ?

HERAKLES

How say'st thou ? Father ! what 's the trouble
here ?

MEGARA

Undone are we !—but thou, old man, forgive
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him ! 4125
For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.
Here are my children killed and I undone !

HERAKLES

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins !

MEGARA

Dead are my brothers and old father too. 4130

HERAKLES

How say'st thou ?—doing what ?—by spear-stroke
whence ?

MEGARA

Lukos destroyed them—the land's noble king !

HERAKLES

Met them in arms ? or through the land's disease ?

MEGARA

Sedition : and he sways seven-gated Thebes.

HERAKLES

Why then came fear on the old man and thee ? 4135

HERAKLES

MEGARA

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? Fearing what from orphanage?

MEGARA

Lest they should some daypayback Kreon's death.

HERAKLES

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus?

MEGARA

These wraps of death we have already donned. 4140

HERAKLES

And you had died through violence? Woe's me!

MEGARA

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard.

HERAKLES

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES

And why was it you left my house and hearth? 4145

MEGARA

Forced thence; thy father—from his very couch!

HERAKLES

And no shame at insulting the old man?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

MEGARA

Shame, truly ! no near neighbours *he* and Shame !

HERAKLES

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends ?

MEGARA

Friends,—are there any to a luckless man ? 4150

HERAKLES

The Minuai-war I waged,—they spat forth these ?

MEGARA

Friendless,—again I tell thee,—is ill-luck.

HERAKLES

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair
And look on light again, and with your eyes
Taste the sweet change from nether dark to day ? 4155
While I—for now there needs iny handiwork—
First I shall go, demolish the abodes
Of these new lordships ; next hew off the head
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find 4160
Were craven though they owed me gratitude,—
Some I intend to handle with this club
Renowned for conquest ; and with winged shafts
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full
With bloody corpses,—Dirké's flow so white 4165
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,
Behoves me rather help than wife and child
And aged father ? Farewell, " Labours " mine !
Vainly I wrought them : my true work lay here !
My business is to die defending these,— 4170
If for their father's sake they meant to die.

HERAKLES

Or how shall we call brave the battling it
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,
If yet I must not labour death away
From my own children? "Conquering Herakles" 4175
Folk will not call me as they used, I think!
The right thing is for parents to assist
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

AMPHITRUON

True, son! thy duty is—be friend to friends
And foe to foes: yet—no more haste than needs! 4180

HERAKLES

Why, father, what is over hasty here?

AMPHITRUON

Many a pauper,—seeming to be rich,
As the word goes,—the king calls partisan.
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob
Their neighbour: for, what good they had at home 4185
Was spent and gone—flew off through idleness.
You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

HERAKLES

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I. 4190
But seeing as I did a certain bird
Not in the lucky seats, I knew some woe
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,
By stealth I made my way into the land.

AMPHITRUON

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise 4195
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see!
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

To drag-forth—slaughter—slay me too,—this king !

But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee—
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town 4200
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here !

HERAKLES

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well ; my home
Let me first enter ! Since at the due time
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells
Haides' wife Koré, let me not affront 4205
Those gods beneath my roof I first should hail !

AMPHITRUON

For didst thou really visit Haides, son ?

HERAKLES

Ay—dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

AMPHITRUON

By fight didst conquer, or through Koré's gift ?

HERAKLES

Fight : well for me, I saw the Orgies first ! 4210

AMPHITRUON

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute ?

HERAKLES

Chthonia's grove, Hermion's city, hold him now.

AMPHITRUON

Does not Eurustheus know thee back on earth ?

HERAKLES

No : I would come first and see matters here.

HERAKLES

AMPHITRUON

But how wast thou below ground such a time ? 4215

HERAKLES

I stopped, from Haides, bringing Theseus up.

AMPHITRUON

And where is he ?—bound o'er the plain for home ?

HERAKLES

Gone glad to Athens—Haides' fugitive !
But, up, boys ! follow father into house !
There 's a far better going-in for you 4220
Truly, than going-out was ! Nay, take heart,
And let the eyes no longer run and run !
And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul
Nor tremble now ! Leave grasping, all of you,
My garments ! I 'm not winged, nor fly from
friends ! 4225

Ah,—

No letting go for these, who all the more
Hang to my garments ! Did you foot indeed
The razor's edge ? Why, then I 'll carry them—
Take with my hands these small craft up, and
tow 4230
Just as a ship would. There ! don't fear I shirk
My children's service ! this way, men are men,
No difference ! best and worst, they love their
boys

After one fashion : wealth they differ in—
Some have it, others not ; but each and all 4235
Combine to form the children-loving race.

CHOROS

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me ;
But age on my head, more heavily

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,
And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the
rays. 4240

Never be mine the preference
Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet
Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth
That 's beauty, whatever the gods dispense !
Whether in wealth we joy, or fret 4245
Paupers,—of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth !

But miserable murderous age I hate !
Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,
Nor ever by rights plague tower or town
Where mortals bide, but still elate 4250
With wings, on ether, precipitate,
Wander them round—nor wait !

But if the gods, to man's degree,
Had wit and wisdom, they would bring
Mankind a twofold youth, to be 4255
Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,
In those with whom life's winter thus grew
spring.

For when they died, into the sun once more
Would they have traversed twice life's racecourse
o'er ;

While ignobility had simply run 4260
Existence through, nor second life begun.
And so might we discern both bad and good
As surely as the starry multitude
Is numbered by the sailors, one and one.

But now the gods by no apparent line 4265
Limit the worthy and the base define ;
Only, a certain period rounds, and so
Brings man more wealth,—but youthful vigour,
no !

HERAKLES

Well ! I am not to pause
Mingling together—wine and wine in cup— 4270
The Graces with the Muses up—
Most dulcet marriage : loosed from music's laws,
No life for me !

But where the wreaths abound, there ever may
I be !

And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné— 4275
Still chant of Herakles the triumph-chant,
Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell
And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,
God of the grape, with man participant !
Not yet will we arrest their glad advance— 4280
The Muses who so long have led me forth to
dance !

A paian—hymn the Delian girls indeed,
Weaving a beauteous measure in and out
His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed ;
And paians—I too, these thy domes about, 4285
From these grey cheeks, my king, will swan-like
shout—

Old songster ! Ay, in song it starts off brave—
“ Zeus' son is he ! ” and yet, such grace of birth
Surpassing far, to man his labours gave
Existence, one calm flow without a wave, 4290
Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the
earth.

LUKOS

From out the house Amphitruon comes—in
time !

For 't is a long while now since ye bedecked
Your bodies with the dead-folk's finery.
But quick ! the boys and wife of Herakles— 4295
Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact
To die, and need no bidding but your own !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

AMPHITRUON

King ! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,
And give me scorn—beside my dead ones here.
Meet in such matters were it, though you reign, 4300
To temper zeal with moderation. Since
You do impose on us the need to die—
Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

LUKOS

Where 's Megara, then ? Alkmené's grandsons,
where ?

AMPHITRUON

She, I think,—as one figures from outside,— 4305

LUKOS

Well, this same thinking,—whataffords its ground ?

AMPHITRUON

—Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps,—

LUKOS

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life !

AMPHITRUON

—And calls on her dead husband, vainly too !

LUKOS

For he 's not come, nor ever will arrive. 4310

AMPHITRUON

Never—at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS

Go to her, and conduct her from the house !

HERAKLES

AMPHITRUON

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS

We,—since thou hast a scruple in the case,—
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads, 4315
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk—
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

AMPHITRUON

Thou—go then! March where needs must! What
remains—

Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,
Expect some ill be done thee!

Ha, old friends! 4320

On he strides beautifully! in the toils
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be
fast—

Minded to kill his neighbours—the arch-knave!

I go, too—I must see the falling corpse!

For he has sweets to give—a dying man, 4325
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

CHOROS

Troubles are over! He the great king once
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

AMPHITRUON

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays
crime—

These insults heaped on better than thyself! 4330

CHOROS

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old
He never dreamed himself was to endure—
King of the country! But enough, old man! 4335
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand—
If somebody be faring as I wish!

LUKOS

Ah me—me!

CHOROS

This strikes the keynote—music to my mind,
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune! 4340
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

LUKOS

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

CHOROS

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness— 4345
Mortal himself, threw up his fool's-conceit
Against the blessed heavenly ones—as though
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man
Exists not any more! The house is mute.
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love, 4350
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting
To Thebes, the sacred city through,
Are a care! for, change and change
Of tears to laughter, old to new, 4355
Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!
He is gone and past, the mighty king!
And the old one reigns, returned—O strange!
From the Acherontian harbour too!

HERAKLES

Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range ! 4360
To the gods, the gods, are crimes a care,
And they watch our virtue, well aware
That gold and that prosperity drive man
Out of his mind—those charioteers who hale
Might-without-right behind them : face who can 4365
Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail ?
—He who evades law and in lawlessness
Delights him,—he has broken down his trust—
The chariot, riches haled—now blackening in the
dust !

Ismenos, go thou garlanded ! 4370
Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed
O' the seven-gated city ! Dirké, thou
Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,
Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival
Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now ! 4375
O woody rock of Puthios and each home
O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come
With joyous shouting to my walls, my town
Where saw the light that Spartan race, those
“Sown,”

Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band 4380
With children's children renovates our land,
To Thebes a sacred light !
O combination of the marriage rite—
Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched
Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny ! 4385
For credible, past hope, becomes to me
That nuptial story long ago avouched,
O Zeus ! and time has turned the dark to bright,
And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan
might—

His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left 4390
Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Thou wast the lord that nature gave me—not
That baseness born and bred—my king, by lot !
—Baseness made plain to all, who now regard
The match of sword with sword in fight,— 4395
If to the gods the Just and Right
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror !
Are we come to the self-same passion of fear,
Old friends?—such a phantasm fronts me here 4400
Visible over the palace-roof !
In flight, in flight, the laggard limb
Bestir ! and haste aloof
From that on the roof there—grand and grim !
O Paian, king ! 4405
Be thou my safeguard from the woeful thing !

IRIS

Courage, old men ! beholding here—Night's birth—
Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,
Iris : since to your town we come, no plague—
Wage war against the house of but one man 4410
From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.
Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,
Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus
Let us once hurt him, Heré nor myself.
But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task, 4415
Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him—
Slaying his children : I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,
Unwedded virgin of black Night ! Drive, drag
Frenzy upon the man here—whirls of brain 4420
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay !
Let go the bloody cable its whole length !
So that,—when o'er the Acherousian ford

HERAKLES

He has sent floating, by self-homicide,
His beautiful boy-garland,—he may know 4425
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free !

MADNESS

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and
Heaven's ; 4430
But here 's my glory,—not to grudge the good !
Nor love I raids against the friends of man.
I wish, then, to persuade,—before I see
You stumbling, you and Heré ! trust my words !
This man, the house of whom ye hound me to, 4435
Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among ;
Since, having quelled waste land and savage
sea,
He alone raised again the falling rights
Of gods—gone ruinous through impious men.
Desire no mighty mischief, I advise ! 4440

IRIS

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes !

MADNESS

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free !

IRIS

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here.

MADNESS

Sun, thee I cite to witness—doing what I loathe
to do !
But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must
subserve, 4445

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds
a-hunt with the huntsman,

—Go I will! and neither the sea, as it groans
with its waves so furiously,

Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder
gasping out heaven's labour-throe,

Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into
the bosom of Herakles!

And home I scatter, and house I batter, 4450
Having first of all made the children fall,—

And he who felled them is never to know
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,
Till the Madness, I am, have let him go!

Ha, behold! already he rocks his head—he is off
from the starting-place! 4455

Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from
their sockets wrenched in the ghastly race!

And the breathings of him he tempers and times
no more than a bull in act to toss,

And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres,
daughters of Tartaros.

Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe
thee quite out of thy mind with fear!

So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to
Olumpos, leave me here! 4460

Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful
shape no mortal sees,

And now are about to pass, from without, inside
of the home of Herakles!

CHOROS

Otototoi,—groan!

Away is mown

Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City! 4465

Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)

HERAKLES

Who worked thee all the good,
Away from thee,—destroyest in a mood
Of madness him, to death whom pipings dance !
There goes she, in her chariot,—groans, her
brood,—

4470

And gives her team the goad, as though adrift
For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose
• glance

Turns man to marble ! with what hissings lift
Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's
inheritance !

Quick has the god changed fortune : through
their sire

4475

Quick will the children, that he saved, expire !
O miserable me ! O Zeus ! thy child—
Childless himself—soon vengeance, hunger-wild,
Craving for punishment, will lay how low—
Loaded with many a woe !

4480

O palace-roofs ! your courts about,
A measure begins all unrejoiced
By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist
Of the Bromian revel-rout !

O ye domes ! and the measure proceeds
For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds
Of the Dionusian pouring-out !

4485

Break forth, fly, children ! fatal this—
Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis !

Ay, for he hunts a children-chase—

4490

Never shall Madness lead her revel
And leave no trace in the dwelling-place !

Ai ai, because of the evil !

Ai ai, the old man—how I groan

For the father, and not the father alone !

4495

She who was nurse of his children,—small
Her gain that they ever were born at all !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

See ! See !

A whirlwind shakes hither and thither

The house—the roof falls in together !

4500

Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus ?

A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,

Such as once F illas on the Titan thundered,

Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered and
wall-sundered !

MESSENGER

O bodies white with age !—

CHOROS

What cry, to me— 4505

What, dost thou call with ?

MESSENGER

There 's a curse indoors.

CHOROS

I shall not bring a prophet : you suffice.

MESSENGER

Dead are the children.

CHOROS

Ai ai !

MESSENGER

Groan ! for, groans

Suit well the subject. Dire the children's death,

Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate. 4510

No one could tell worse woe than we have borne.

CHOROS

How dost thou that same curse—curse, cause for
groan—

The father's on the children, make appear ?

HERAKLES

Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven
Against the house—these evils ; and recount 4515
The children's hapless fate, O Messenger !

MESSENGER

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,
A household-expiation : since the king
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast 4520
From out the dwelling ; and a beauteous choir
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.
And now the basket had been carried round
The altar in a circle, and we used
The consecrated speech. Alkmené's son,—
Just as he was about, in his right hand, 4525
To bear the torch, that he might dip into
The cleansing-water,—came to a stand-still ;
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself
No longer : lost in rollings of the eyes ; 4530
Outthrusting eyes—their very roots—like blood !
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,
And said—together with a madman's laugh—
“ Father ! why sacrifice, before I slay
Eurustheus ? why have twice the lustral fire, 4535
And double pains, when 't is permitted me
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here ?
Then,—when I hither bring Eurustheus' head,—
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all !
Now,—cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets
down ! 4540
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club ?
I go to that Mukenai. One must match
Crowbars and mattocks, so that—those sunk stones
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line
red—
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble town.” 4545

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Which said, he goes and—with no car to have—
Affirms he has one ! mounts the chariot-board,
And strikes, as having really goad in hand !
And two ways laughed the servants—laugh with
awe ;

And one said, as each met the other's stare, 4550
“ Playing us boys' tricks ? or is master mad ? ”

But up he climbs, and down along the roof,
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains
He 's come to Nisos city, when he 's come
Only inside his own house ! then reclines 4555
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,
Makes himself supper ; goes through some brief
stay,

Then says he 's traversing the forest-flats
Of Isthmos ; thereupon lays body bare
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with 4560
—No one ! and is proclaimed the conqueror—

He by himself—having called out to hear
—Nobody ! Then, if you will take his word,
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,
He 's at Mekenai. But his father laid 4565
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus :
“ O son, what ails thee ? Of what sort is this
Extravagance ? Has not some murder-craze,
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,
Danced thee drunk ? ” But he,—taking him to
crouch, 4570

Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched
His hand, a suppliant,—pushes him aside,
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against
His children—thinking them Eurustheus' boys
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear, 4575
Rushed here and there,—this child, into the robes
O' the wretched mother—this, beneath the shade
O' the column,—and this other, like a bird,

HERAKLES

Cowered at the altar-foot. The mother shrieks
 "Parent—whatdost thou?—kill thy children?" So 4580
 Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.
 But he, outwinding him, as round about
 The column ran the boy,—a horrid whirl
 O' the lathe his foot described !—stands opposite,
 Strikes through the liver ; and supine the boy 4585
 Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.
 But " Victory ! " he shouted—boasted thus :
 " Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus—dead—
 Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate ! "
 Then bends bow on another who was crouched 4590
 At base of altar—overlooked, he thought—
 And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,
 Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.
 " O dearest ! " cries he ; " father, kill me not !
 Yours I am—your boy : not Eurustheus' boy 4595
 You kill now ! " But he, rolling the wild eye
 Of Gorgon,—as the boy stood all too close
 For deadly bowshot,—mimicry of smith
 Who batters red-hot iron,—hand o'er head
 Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair 4600
 Hurlsitandbreaksthebone. Thissecondcaught,—
 He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice
 He and the couple ; but, beforehand here,
 The miserable mother catches up,
 Carries him inside house and bars the gate. 4605
 Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,
 Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenches doorposts out,
 Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.
 And this done, at the old man's death he drives ;
 But there came, as it seemed to us who saw, 4610
 A statue—Pallas with the crested head,
 Swinging her spear—and threw a stone which smote
 Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,
 And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Striking against the column with his back— 4615
Column which, with the falling of the roof,
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds
Of rope-noose to the column, so that he, 4620
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor
wretch,
No gift of any god ! since he has slain
Children and wife. For me, I do not know
What mortal has more misery to bear. 4625

CHOROS

A murder there was which Argolis
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,
As, at that time, best and famousest :
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.
A murder indeed was that ! but this 4630
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed.
I am able to speak of a murder done
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too—
Prokné's son, who had but one—
Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say 4635
Rather, who Itus sing alway,
Her single child. But thou, the sire
Of children three—O thou consuming fire !—
In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire.
And this outrageous fate— 4640
What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,
Or choric dance of Haides shall I urge
The Muse to celebrate ?

Woe ! woe ! behold !
The portalled palace lies unrolled, 4645
This way and that way, each prodigious fold !

HERAKLES

Alas for me ! these children, see,
Stretched, hapless group, before their father—he
The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out
The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep ! 4650
And bonds, see, all about,—
Rope-tangle, ties and tether,—these
Tightenings around the body of Herakles
To the stone columns of the house made fast !

But—like a bird that grieves 4655
For callow nestlings some rude hand bereaves—
See, here, a bitter journey overpast,
The old man—all too late—is here at last !

AMPHITRUON

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians !
Will ye not suffer my son, diffused 4660
Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep ?

CHOROS

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,
And the children too, and the head there—
used
Of old to the wreaths and paians !

AMPHITRUON

Farther away ! Nor beat the breast, 4665
Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest
The slumberer—asleep, so best !

CHOROS

Ah me—what a slaughter !

AMPHITRUON

Refrain—refrain !
Ye will prove my perdition.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

CHOROS

Unlike water,
Bloodshed rises from earth again. 4670

AMPHITRUON

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain—
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,
And bury the city in ravage—bray
Father and house to dust away! 4675

CHOROS

I cannot forbear—I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON

Ay,—sleeps! A horror of slumber keeps
The man who has piled 4680
On wife and child
Death and death, as he shot them down
With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS

Wail—

AMPHITRUON

Even so!

CHOROS

—The fate of the children—

HERAKLES

AMPHITRUON

Triple woe !

CHOROS

—Old man, the fate of thy son ! 4685

AMPHITRUON

Hush, hush ! Have done !
He is turning about !
He is breaking out !
Away ! I steal
And my body conceal, 4690
Before he arouse,
In the depths of the house.

CHOROS

Courage ! The Night
Maintains her right
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight ! 4695

AMPHITRUON

See, see ! To leave the light
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,
I do not avoid ; but if he kill
Me his own father, and devise
Beyond the present miseries 4700
A misery more ghastly still—
And to haunt him, over and above
Those here who, as they used to love,
Now hate him, what if he have with these
My murder, the worst of Erinues ? 4705

CHOROS

Then was the time to die, for thee,
When ready to wreak in the full degree

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Vengeance on those
Thy consort's foes
Who murdered her brothers ! glad, life's close, 4710
With the Taphioi down,
And sacked their town
Clustered about with a wash of sea !

AMPHITRUON

To flight—to flight !
Away from the house, troop off, old men ! 4715
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight !
He is rousing himself right up : and then,
Murder on murder heaping anew,
He will revel in blood your city through !

CHOROS

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate, 4720
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes ?

HERAKLES

Ha,—
In breath indeed I am—see things I ought—
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts !
But then—some billow and strange whirl of sense 4725
I have fallen into ! and breathings hot I breathe—
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.
See now ! Whybound,—at moorings like a ship,—
About my young breast and young arm, to this
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I 4730
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighbourhood ?
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow
Which played my brother-shieldman, held in
hand,—
Guarded my side, and got my guardianship !
I cannot have gone back to Haides—twice 4735
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence ?

HERAKLES

But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid !
I am struck witless sure ! Where can I be ?
Ho there ! what friend of mine is near or far— 4740
Some one to cure me of bewilderment ?
For nought familiar do I recognize.

AMPHITRUON

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes ?

CHOROS

Ay, and let me too,—nor desert your ills !

HERAKLES

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up 4745
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son ?

AMPHITRUON

O child !—for, faring badly, mine thou art !

HERAKLES

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow ?

AMPHITRUON

Ill,—would cause any god who bore, to groan !

HERAKLES

That's boasting, truly ! still, you state no hap. 4750

AMPHITRUON

For, thyself seest—if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES

Heyday ! How riddlingly that hint returns !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

AMPHITRUON

Well, I am trying—art thou sane and sound !

HERAKLES

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge !

AMPHITRUON

If thou no more art Haides-drunk,—I tell !

4755

HERAKLES

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what ?

HERAKLES

And who was binder, tell !—not *that*, my deed !

AMPHITRUON

Mind that much of misfortune—pass the rest !

HERAKLES

Enough ! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

4760

AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work ?

HERAKLES

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence ?

AMPHITRUON

Let be the goddess—bury thine own guilt !

HERAKLES

Undone ! What is the sorrow thou wilt say ?

HERAKLES

AMPHITRUON

Look ! See the ruins of thy children here ! 4765

HERAKLES

Ah me ! What sight do wretched I behold ?

AMPHITRUON

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst
On thine own children !

HERAKLES

What fight ? Who slew these ?

AMPHITRUON

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES

How say'st ? What did I ? Ill-announcing sire ! 4770

AMPHITRUON

—Go mad ! Thou' askest a sad clearing up.

HERAKLES

And am I also murderer of my wife ?

AMPHITRUON

All the work here was just one hand's work—thine !

HERAKLES

Ai ai—for groans encompass me—a cloud !

AMPHITRUON

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate. 4775

HERAKLES

Did I break up my house or dance it down ?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

AMPHITRUON

I know just one thing—all 's a woe with thee.

HERAKLES

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES

Ah me ! why is it then I save my life— 4780
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys ?
Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become
My children's blood-avenger ? or, this flesh
Burning away with fire, so thrust away 4785
The infamy, which waits me there, from life ?

Ah but,—a hindrance to my purposed death,
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here !
Eyes will be on me ! my child-murder-plague
In evidence before friends loved so much ! 4790
O me, what shall I do ? Where, taking wing
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out
A solitariness from misery ?
I will pull night upon my muffled head !
Let this wretch here content him with his curse 4795
Of blood : I would pollute no innocents.

THESEUS

I come,—with others who await beside
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth,—
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship !
For a bruit reached the Erechtheidai's town 4800
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.

HERAKLES

So, paying good back,—Herakles began,
Saving me down there,—I have come, old man,
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want. 4805
What 's here? Why all these corpses on the
ground?

Am I perhaps behindhand—come too late
For newer ill? Who killed these children
now?

Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?
Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear! 4810
Some other woe than war, I chance upon.

AMPHITRUON

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height!—

THESEUS

Why hail'st thou me with woeful prelude thus?

AMPHITRUON

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

THESEUS

These boys,—who are they thou art weeping o'er? 4815

AMPHITRUON

He gave them birth, indeed, my hapless son!
Begot, but killed them—dared their bloody death.

THESEUS

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON

Would I might obey!

THESEUS

O teller of dread tidings!

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

AMPHITRUON

Lost—flown away from life !
Lost are we—

THESEUS

What sayest thou ? 4820
What did he ?

AMPHITRUON

Erring through a frenzy-fit,
He did all, with the arrows dipt in dye
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS

Heré's strife !
But who is this among the dead, old man ?

AMPHITRUON

Mine, mine, this progeny—the labour-plagued, 4825
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield.

THESEUS

Woe—woe ! What man was born mischanceful
thus !

AMPHITRUON

Thou couldst not know another mortal man
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings. 4830

THESEUS

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head ?

AMPHITRUON

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness
And kinship,—nor that children's-blood about.

HERAKLES

THESEUS

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me !
Uncover him !

AMPHITRUON

O child, put from thine eyes 4835
The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun !
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears
in thee.
I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear !
O son, remit the savage lion's mood, 4840
Since to a bloody, an unholy race
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute
To go on adding ill to ill, my child !

THESEUS

Let me speak ! Thee, who sittest—seated woe—
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye ! 4845
For there 's no darkness has a cloud so black
May hide thy misery thus absolute.
Why, waving hand, dost sign me—murder 's done ?
Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech ?
Nought care I to—with thee, at least—fare ill : 4850
For I had joy once ! *Then*,—soul rises to,—
When thou didst save me from the dead to light !
Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,
And him who likes to share when things look fine,
But, sail along with friends in trouble—no ! 4855
Arise, uncover thine unhappy head !
Look on us ! Every man of the right race
Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

HERAKLES

Theseus, hast seen this match—my boys with me ?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

THESEUS

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st. 4860

HERAKLES

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS

Why? mortals bring no plague on aught divine.

HERAKLES

Fly, O unhappy, this my impious plague!

THESEUS

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends.

HERAKLES

I praise thee. But I helped thee,—that is truth. 4865

THESEUS

And I, advantaged then, now 'pity thee.

HERAKLES

—The pitiable,—my children's murderer!

THESEUS

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.

HERAKLES

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge
distress! 4870

HERAKLES

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

HERAKLES

THESEUS

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods ?

HERAKLES

Gods please themselves : to gods I give their like.

THESEUS

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe !

HERAKLES

I am full fraught with ills—no stowing more ! 4875

THESEUS

Thou wilt do—what, then ? Whither moody
borne ?

HERAKLES

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS

Thou hast used words of—what man turns up first !

HERAKLES

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus ?— 4880

HERAKLES

Not the so much-enduring : measure 's past.

THESEUS

—Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend ?

HERAKLES

They nowise profit me : but Heré rules.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

THESEUS

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments 4885
Against thy teachings ! I will ope thee out
My life—past, present—as unliveable.
First, I was born of this man, who had slain
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,
Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth. 4890
Now, when the basis of a family
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall ;
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man !
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee), 4895
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes,—
That bedfellow of Zeus !—to end me so.
But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,
The labours I endured—what need to tell ? 4900
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,
Tuphons or giants, or the four-legg'd swarms
Of Kentauro-battle, did not I end out ?
And that hound, headed all about with heads
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain— 4905
I both went through a myriad other toils
In full drove, and arrived among the dead
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light
Haides' three-headed dog and doorkeeper.
But then I,—wretch,—dared this last labour—
see ! 4910
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.
To such a strait I come ! nor my dear Thebes
Dare I inhabit : and, suppose I stay ?
Into what fane or festival of friends

HERAKLES

Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost! 4915
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?
But say—I hurry to some other town!
And there they eye me, as notorious now,—
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key—
“Is not this he, Zeus’ son, who murdered once 4920
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!”
To any man renowned as happy once,
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom
Evil is old acquaintance there ’s no hurt
To speak of, he and misery are twins. 4925
To this degree of woe I think to come:
For earth will utter voice forbidding me
To touch the ground, and sea—to pierce the wave,
The river-springs—to drink, and I shall play
Ixion’s part quite out, the chained and wheeled! 4930
And best of all will be, if so I ’scape
Sight from one man of those Hellenes,—once
I lived among, felicitous and rich!
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead? 4935
In fine, let Zeus’ brave consort dance and sing,
Stamp foot, the Olumpian Zeus’ own sandal-trick!
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass—
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray 4940
To such a goddess?—that, begrudging Zeus
Because he loved a woman, ruins me—
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

THESEUS

This strife is from no other of the gods
Than Zeus’ wife; rightly apprehend, as well, 4945
Why, to no death—thou meditatest now—
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Nor gods—if poets' teaching be not false.
 Have not they joined in wedlock against law 4950
 With one another? not, for sake of rule,
 Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,
 All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads
 High there, notorious sinners though they be!
 What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born, 4955
 Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?
 Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law
 And follow me to Pallas' citadel!
 There, when thy hands are purified from stain,
 House will I give thee, and goods shared alike. 4960
 What gifts I hold too from the citizens
 For saving twice seven children, when I slew
 The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.
 And everywhere about the land are plots
 Apportioned me: these, named by thine own name, 4965
 Shall be henceforward styled by all men—thine,
 Thy life long; but at death, when Haides-bound,
 All Athens shall uphold the honoured one
 With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps:
 For that 's a fair crown our Hellenes grant 4970
 Their people—glory, should they help the brave!
 And I repay thee back this grace for thine
 That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends—
 Since, when the gods give honour, friends may
 flit:
 For, a god's help suffices, if he please. 4975

HERAKLES

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes!
 I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,
 Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands,
 Have I judged worthy faith, at any time;
 Nor shall I be persuaded—one is born 4980
 His fellows' master! since God stands in need—

HERAKLES

If he is really God—of nought at all.
 These are the poets' pitiful conceits !
 But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed—
 "Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice 4985
 Somehow in leaving thus the light of day !"
 For whoso cannot make a stand against
 These same misfortunes, neither could withstand
 A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to
 strength.
 Therefore unto thy city I will go 4990
 And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.
 There ! I have tasted of ten thousand toils
 As truly—never waived a single one,
 Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes :
 Nor ever thought it would have come to this— 4995
 That I from out my eyes do drop tears. Well !
 At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.
 So be it ! Old man, thou seest my exile—
 Seest, too, me—my children's murderer !
 These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead, 5000
 Doing them honour with thy tears—since me
 Law does not sanction. Propping on her breast,
 And giving them into their mother's arms,
 —Re-institute the sad community
 Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness— 5005
 Not by my will ! And, when earth hides the dead,
 Live in this city !—sad, but, all the same,
 Force thy soul to bear woe along with me !
 O children, who begat and gave you birth—
 Your father—has destroyed you ! nought you gain 5010
 By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,
 As by main-force I laboured glory out
 To give you,—that fine gift of fatherhood !
 And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,
 Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st 5015
 My marriage-bed inviolate,—those long

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Household-seclusions draining to the dregs
Inside my house ! O me, my wife, my boys—
And—O myself, how, miserably moved,
Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife ! 5020
O bitter those delights of kisses now—
And bitter these my weapons' fellowship !
For I am doubtful whether shall I keep
Or cast away these arrows which will clang
Ever such words out, as they knock my side— 5025
“Us—thou didst murder wife and children
with !
Us—child-destroyers—still thou keepest thine !”
Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then ? What
Say for excuse ? Yet, naked of my darts
Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through, 5030
Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,
Shall I die basely ? No ! relinquishment
Of these must never be,—companions once,
We sorrowfully must observe the pact.
In just one thing, co-operate with me 5035
Thy sad friend, Theseus ! Go'along with him
To Argos, and in concert get arranged
The price my due for bringing there the Hound !
O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,
Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament, 5040
Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,
Lament the whole of us—my dead and me—
Since all together are fordone and lost,
Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate !

THESEUS

Rise up now from thy dead ones ! Tears enough, 5045
Poor friend !

HERAKLES

I cannot : for my limbs are fixed.

HERAKLES

THESEUS

Ay : even these strong men fate overthrows.

HERAKLES

Woe !

Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more !

THESEUS

Cease ! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now ! 5050

HERAKLES

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes.

THESEUS

Squeeze out and spare no drop ! I take it all !

HERAKLES

Of sons bereaved, I have thee like my son.

THESEUS

Give to my neck thy hand ! 't is I will lead.

HERAKLES

Yoke-fellows friendly—one heart-broken, though ! 5055
O father, such a man we need for friend !

AMPHITRUON

Certes the land that bred him boasts good sons.

HERAKLES

Turn me round, Theseus—to behold my boys !

THESEUS

What ? will the having such a love-charm
soothe ?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

HERAKLES

I want it ; and to press my father's breast.

5060

AMPHITRUON

See here, O son ! for, what I love thou seek'st.

THESEUS

Strange ! Of thy labours no more memory ?

HERAKLES

All those were less than these, those ills I bore.

THESEUS

Who sees thee grow a woman,—will not praise.

HERAKLES

I live low to thee ? Not so once, I think.

5065

THESEUS

Too low by far ! “ Famed Herakles ”—where 's
he ?

HERAKLES

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou* ?

THESEUS

As far as courage—least of all mankind !

HERAKLES

How say'st, then, / in evils shrink to nought ?

THESEUS

Forward !

HERAKLES

Farewell, old father !

HERAKLES

AMPHITRUON

Thou too, son ! 5070

HERAKLES

Bury the boys as I enjoined !

AMPHITRUON

Who will be found to bury now, my child ?
And *me*—

HERAKLES

Myself.

AMPHITRUON

When, coming ?

HERAKLES

When thy task is done.

AMPHITRUON

How ?

HERAKLES

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth 5075
Is burthened by ! Myself,—who with these shames
Have cast away my house,—a ruined hulk,
I follow—trailed by Theseus—on my way ;
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein. 5080

CHOROS

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,
Sobs that increase with tears that start ;
The greatest of all our friends of yore
We have lost for evermore !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

When the long silence ended,—“Our best friend— 5085
 Lost, our best friend!” he muttered musingly.
 Then, “Lachares the sculptor” (half aloud)
 “Sinned he or sinned he not? ‘Outrageous sin!’
 Shuddered our elders, ‘Pallas should be clothed :
 He carved her naked.’ ‘But more beautiful!’ 5090
 Answers this generation : ‘Wisdom formed
 For love not fear!’ And there the statue stands,
 Entraps the eye severer art repels.
 Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt
 Yet has not struck the artist all this while. 5095
 Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides
 And Lachares? But youth will have its way.
 The ripe man ought to be as old as young—
 As young as old. I too have youth at need.
 Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare. 5100

“And who’s ‘our best friend’? You play kottabos;
 Here’s the last mode of playing. Take a sphere
 With orifices at due interval,
 Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit
 Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside 5105
 To where, in hollow midst, a manikin
 Suspended ever bobs with head erect
 Right underneath whatever hole’s a-top
 When you set orb a-rolling : plumb, he gets
 Ever this benediction of the splash. 5110
 An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed :
 Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,
 And only when that one,—and rare the chance,—
 Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too :
 He can’t turn all sides with the turning orb. 5115
 Inside this sphere of life,—all objects, sense
 And soul perceive,—Euripides hangs fixed,
 Gets knowledge through the single aperture
 Of High and Right : with visage fronting these

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

He waits the wine thence ere he operate, 5120
 Work in the world and write a tragedy.
 When that hole happens to revolve to point,
 In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.
 But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong—
 When these enjoy the moment's altitude, 5125
 His heels are found just where his head should be!
 No knowledge that way! / I am moveable,—
 To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,
 Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,
 And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every
 turn,— 5130
 Equally favoured by their opposites.
 Little and Bad exist, are natural :
 Then let me know them, and be twice as great
 As he who only knows one phase of life !
 So doubly shall I prove 'best friend of man,' 5135
 If I report the whole truth—Vice, perceived
 While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.
 Man 's made of both : and both must be of use
 To somebody : if not to him, to me.
 While, as to your imaginary Third 5140
 Who, stationed (by mechanics past my guess)
 So as to take in every side at once,
 And not successively,—may reconcile
 The High and Low in tragi-comic verse,—
 He shall be hailed superior to us both 5145
 When born—in the Tin-islands! Meantime, here
 In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,
 Call myself Iostephanos' 'best friend,'
 Who took my own course, worked as I descried
 Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty. 5150

" For listen! There 's no failure breaks the heart,
 Whate'er be man's endeavour in this world,
 Like the rash poet's when he—nowise fails

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

By poetizing badly,—Zeus or makes
Or mars a man, so—at it, merrily! 5155
But when,—made man,—much like myself,—
equipt
For such and such achievement,—rash he turns
Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat
From—who's the appointed fellow born thereto,—
Crows take him!—in your Kassiterides? 5160
Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,
That were the failure. Here I stand, heart-whole,
No Thamuris!

“Well thought of, Thamuris!
Has zeal, pray, for ‘best friend’ Euripides
Allowed you to observe the honour done 5165
His elder rival, in our Poikilé?
You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,
Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,
Our Sophokles,—youth, beauty, dedicate
To Thamuris who named the tragedy. 5170
The voice of him was weak; face, limbs and
lyre,
These were worth saving: Thamuris stands yet
Perfect as painting helps in such a case.
At least you know the story, for ‘best friend’
Enriched his ‘Rhesos’ from the Blind Bard's store; 5175
So haste and see the work, and lay to heart
What it was struck me when I eyed the piece!
Here stands a poet punished for rash strife
With Powers above his power, who see with sight
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly 5180
A song, which he must needs dare emulate.
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse!

“But—lend me the psalterton! Nay, for once—
Once let my hand fall where the other's lay!

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

I see it, just as I were Sophokles,
That sunrise and combustion of the east !” 5185

And then he sang—are these unlike the words ?

Thamuris marching,—lyre and song of Thrace—
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race !) 5190

Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there
By kingly Eurutos of late, now bound
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios (ore with earth enwound
Glittered beneath his footstep)—marching gay 5195
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and
crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, mid a ray
Of early morn,—came, saw and knew the spot
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura—happier while its name was not— 5200
Met him, but nowise menaced ; slipt aside,
Obsequious river, to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide. 5205

Thamuris, marching, laughed “Each flake of foam”
(As sparkingly the ripple raced him by)
“Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome !”

For Autumn was the season ; red the sky
Held morn’s conclusive signet of the sun 5210
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Morn had the mastery as, one by one
All pomps produced themselves along the tract
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact 5215
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished now,
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow? 5220

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
About it, joined the rush of air and light
And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

Say not the birds flew! they forebore their right—
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things. 5225
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was
flight—

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings,—

So did the near and far appear to touch 5230
I' the moment's transport,—that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too
much;

And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange— 5235

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship, 5240
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport ; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip—

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long 5245
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand
Pedestalled mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,
(Ay, for we see them)—Thamuris of Thrace
Predominating foremost of the band. 5250

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again
From flush of pride ; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from
plain,
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed? 5255
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music ; but his own outburst
Of victory concluded the account,
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

" Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount ! 5260
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto !
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount !

" Here I await the end of this ado :
Which wins—Earth's poet or the Heavenly
Muse." . . .

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

But song broke up in laughter. "Tell the rest 5265
 Who may! / have not spurned the common life,
 Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse
 Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,
 I shall not decorate her vestibule—
 Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain, 5270
 Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!
 —Not Thamuris but Aristophanes!

"There! I have sung content back to myself,
 And started subject for a play beside.
 My next performance shall content you both. 5275
 Did 'Prelude-Battle' maul 'best friend' too much?
 Then 'Main-Fight' be my next song, fairness' self!
 Its subject—Contest for the Tragic Crown.
 Ay, you shall hear none else but Aischulos
 Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove 5280
 'Best friend' a stray-away,—no praise denied
 His manifold deservings, never fear—
 Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends.
 Sound admonition has its due effect.
 Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe! 5285
 Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,
 In judgment, regular, legitimate.
 Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay—
 For there's a buzz about those 'Bacchanals'
 Rumour attributes to your great and dead 5290
 For final effort: just the prodigy
 Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!
 —Until we make acquaintance with our fate
 And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive
 Perchance to honour more the patron-god, 5295
 Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.
 Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,
 Earth blossoms youthfully. Athenai breathes.
 After a twenty-six years' wintry blank

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Struck from her life,—war-madness, one long
 swoon, 5300
 She wakes up : Arginousai bids good cheer.
 We have disposed of Kallikratidas ;
 Once more will Sparté sue for terms,—who knows ?
 Cede Dekeleia, as the rumour runs :
 Terms which Athenai, of right mind again, 5305
 Accepts—she can no other. Peace declared,
 Have my long labours borne their fruit or no ?
 Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain ?
 Enough—it simply saved you. Saved ones, praise
 Theoria's beauty and Opora's breadth ! 5310
 Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,
 Forget the Bald Bard, Envy ! but go burst
As the cup goes round and the cates abound,
Collops of hare with roast spinks rare !
 Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served 5315
 A purpose : guttlings, guzzlings, had their use !
 Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,
 Or 'best friend's' heavy-hand, Melpomené,
 Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,
 And built Athenai to the skies once more ! 5320
 Farewell, brave couple ! Next year, welcome me !"

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere !
 One story he referred to, false or fact,
 Was not without adaptability.
 They do say—Lais the Corinthian once 5325
 Chancing to see Euripides (who paced
 Composing in a garden, tablet-book
 In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)
 "Answer me," she began, "O Poet,—this !
 What didst intend by writing in thy play 5330
Go hang, thou filthy doer ?" Struck on heap,
 Euripides, at the audacious speech—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

"Well now," quoth he, "thyself art just the one
I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!"
She laughingly retorted his own line
"What's filth,—unless who does it, thinks it so?" 5335

Somight he doubtless think. "Farewell," said we.

And he was gone, lost in the morning-grey,
Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we
dream?

Could the poor twelve-hours hold this argument 5340
We render durable from fugitive,
As duly at each sunset's droop of sail,
Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,
I still remember, you as duly dint
Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style, 5345
Into—what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes
From eloquence made captive: thus mere words
—Ah, would the lifeless body stay! But no:
Change upon change till,—who may recognize
What did soul service, in the dusty heap? 5350
What energy of Aristophanes
Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?
Ashes be evidence how fire—with smoke—
All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.
The poet—I shall say—burned up and, blank 5355
Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,
Comes yet. Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first,—he gone, if jollity went too,
Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred, 5360
Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Has this meek consolation : neither ills
We dread, nor joys we dare anticipate,
Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed—
Euripides and Aristophanes ; 5365
Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives ;
But germinates,—perhaps enough to judge,—
Next year ?

Whereas, next year brought harvest time !
For, next year came, and went not, but is now,
Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes 5370
That 's all but reached—and harvest has it brought,
Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop.
Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,
Happy as ever ; though men mournfully
Plausive,—when only soul could triumph now, 5375
And Iophon produced his father's play,—
Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous
Dared the descent mid earthquake-thundering,
And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard
Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged 5380
Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,
Triumphant also, followed with his "Frogs :"
Produced at next Lenaia,—three months since,—
The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free ! 5385
As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,
(Himself swore—wine that conquers every kind
For long abiding in the head) could fix
Thenceforward any object in its truth,
Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew, 5390
Nor miss the borrowed medium,—vinous drop
That colours all to the right crimson pitch
When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge
Of malice !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

All was Aristophanes :

There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame. 5395

Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God
In person ! and when duly dragged through
mire,—

Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward,
flung

The boys their dose of fit indecency,
And finally got trounced to heart's content, 5400

At his own feast, in his own theatre
(—Oh never fear ! 'T was consecrated sport,
Exact tradition, warranted no whit
Offensive to instructed taste,—indeed,
Essential to Athenai's liberty, 5405

Could the poor stranger understand !) why, then—

He was pronounced the rarely-qualified
To rate the work, adjust the claims to worth,
Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,
This same appreciative poet pleased 5410

To say " He 's all one stiff and gluey piece
Of back of swine's neck ! ")—and of Chatterbox
Who, " twisting words like wool," usurped his seat
In Plouton's realm : " the arch-rogue, liar, scamp
That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts," 5415
—Who failed to recognize Euripides ?

Then came a contest for supremacy—

Crammed full of genius, wit and fun and freak.

No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish
Of all sorts,—for the Mystics matched the Frogs 5420
In poetry, no Seiren sang so sweet !—

Till, pressed into the service (how dispense
With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display ?)

The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,
Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain 5425
How baby-work like " Herakles " had birth !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Last, Bacchos,—candidly disclaiming brains
Able to follow finer argument,—
Confessed himself much moved by three main
facts :

First,—if you stick a “ Lost his flask of oil ” 5430
At pause of period, you perplex the sense—
Were it the Elegy for Marathon !

Next, if you weigh two verses, “ car ”—the word,
Will outweigh “ club ”—the word, in each packed
line !

And—last, worst fact of all !—in rivalry 5435
The younger poet dared to improvise
Laudation less distinct of—Triphales ?

(Nay, that served when ourself abused the youth !)
Pheidippides ? (nor that 's appropriate now !)

Then,—Alkibiades, our city's hope, 5440
Since times change and we Comics should change
too !

These three main facts, well weighed, drew judg-
ment down,

Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate—
“ Fate due ” admonished the sage Mystic choir,
“ To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates, 5445
Neglecting music and each tragic aid ! ”

—All wound-up by a wish “ We soon may cease
From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them ! ”

—Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,
War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain 5450

Had Sparté cried once more “ But grant us Peace
We give you Dekeleia back ! ” Too shrewd

Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,
The enemy—at final gasp, besides !

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize, 5455
And so Athenai felt she had a friend
Far better than her “ best friend,” lost last year ;

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

And so, such fame had "Frogs" that, when came
round

This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again
At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month. 5460
Only—there happened Aigispotamoi !

And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,
Plump o' the sudden, pounces stern King Stork
On the light-hearted people of the marsh !
Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate, 5465
Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay
With oars which brought a hundred triremes back
Captive !

And first word of the conqueror
Was "Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios'
pride !
Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks ! Peace needs
none !" 5470
And "We obey" they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposure of decree—
"No longer democratic government !
Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves
Please to appoint you !"—then the horror stung 5475
Dreamers awake ; they started up a-stare
At the half-helot captain and his crew
—Spartans, "men used to let their hair grow
long,
To fast, be dirty, and just—Socratize"—
Whose word was "Trample on Themistokles !" 5480

So, as the way is with much misery,
The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts
Sunk as they stood in stupor. "Wreck the Walls?
Ruin Peiraios?—with our Pallas armed

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

For interference?—Herakles apprised, 5485
And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls
low?"

Three days they stood, stared,—stonier than their
walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke :
Saw the prostration of his enemy,
Utter and absolute beyond belief, 5490
Past hope of hatred even. I surmise
He also probably saw fade in fume
Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,
Nor apprehended any more that gods
And heroes,—fire, must glow forth, guard the
ground 5495
Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay
Powerless Athenai, late predominant
Lady of Hellas,—Sparté's slave-prize now !
Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs ?
What was to move his circumspection ? Why 5500
Demolish just Peiraios ?

“Stay!” bade he :
“Already promise-breakers? True to type,
Athenians ! past and present and to come—
The fickle and the false ! No stone dislodged,
No implement applied, yet three days' grace 5505
Expire ! Forbearance is no longer-lived.
By breaking promise, terms of peace you break—
Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness !
All must be reconsidered—yours the fault !”

Wherewith, he called a council of allies. 5510
Pent-up resentment used its privilege,—
Outburst at ending : this the summed result.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

" Because we would avenge no transient wrong
 But an eternity of insolence,
 Aggression,—folly, no disasters mend, 5515
 Pride, no reverses teach humility,—
 Because too plainly were all punishment,
 Such as comports with less obdurate crime,
 Evadable by falsehood, fickleness—
 Experience proves the true Athenian type,— 5520
 Therefore, 't is need we dig deep down into
 The root of evil ; lop nor bole nor branch.
 Look up, look round and see, on every side,
 What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit !
 We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed, 5525
 Build barns for temples, prize mud-monuments,
 Nor show the sneering stranger aught but—men,—
 Spartans take insult of Athenians just
 Because they boast Akropolis to mount,
 And Propylaia to make entry by, 5530
 Through a mad maze of marble arrogance
 Such as you see—such as let none see more !
 Abolish the detested luxury !
 Leave not one stone upon another, raze
 Athenai to the rock ! Let hill and plain 5535
 Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground
 Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend
 From shapeless crags once columns ! so at last
 Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough."

Whereon, a shout approved "Such peace bestow !" 5540

Then did a Man of Phokis rise—O heart !
 Rise—when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,
 No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,
 Rise—when mere human argument could stem
 No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce, 5545
 Baffle no wrath-wave that o'er barrier broke—

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Who was the Man of Phokis rose and flung
A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,
Which—stop for?—nay, had stamped down
sword's assault!

Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch 5550
“ Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,
Elektra, palaced once, a visitant
To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come ? ”

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease 5555
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now—
Full in the hideous faces—last resource,
You flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush 5560
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm—
So did the power of that triumphant play
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!
Triumphant play, wherein our poet first 5565
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two
Down to the level of our common life,
Close to the beating of our common heart.
Elektra? 'T was Athenai, Sparté's ice
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed— 5570
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags, 5575
Patient performer of the poorest chares,
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's
 brood, 5580
 And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,
 And poetry is power, and Euthukles
 Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same—
 Sudden, the ice-thaw ! The assembled foe,
 Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness, 5585
 Cried " Reverence Elektra ! "—cried " Abstain
 Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate
 The sanctity of such reverse ! Let stand
 Athenai ! "

Mindful of that story's close,

Perchance, and how,—when he, the Herdsman
 chaste, 5590
 Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep,—
 All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,
 Knocks at the door : with searching glance, notes
 keen,
 Knows quick, through mean attire and disre-
 spect,
 The ravaged princess ! Ay, right on, the clutch 5595
 Of guiding retribution has in charge
 The author of the outrage ! While one hand,
 Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast
 On fate,—the other strains, prepared to push
 The victim-queen, should she make frightened
 pause 5600
 Before that serpentining blood which steals
 Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,
 Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow
 Dreadful Orestes !

Klutaimnestra, wise

This time, forbore ; Elektra held her own ; 5605
 Saved was Athenai through Euripides,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Through Euthukles, through—more than ever—
 me,
 Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,
 Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so !

5610

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,
 The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,
 Grew sudden sober at the enormity,
 And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift ;
 Splenetically must repay its cost
 5615
 By due increase of rigour, doglike snatch
 At aught still left dog to concede like man.
 Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,
 Smoothly the land-line reached as for repose—
 Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway ;
 But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loth, 5620
 Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.
 So, harsh Lusandros—pinioned to inflict
 The lesser penalty alone—spoke harsh,
 As minded to embitter scathe by scorn.

“ Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre ! 5625
 If Tragedy withdraws her presence—quick,
 If Comedy replace her,—what more just ?
 Let Comedy do service, frisk away,
 Dance off stage these indomitable stones,
 Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks ! Hew and heave, 5630
 Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence !
 Not to the Kommos—*eleleleleu*
 With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,
 But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow
 At kordax-end—the hearty slapping-dance ! 5635
 Collect those flute-girls—trash who flattered ear
 With whistlings and fed eye with caper-cuts
 While we Lakonians supped black broth or
 crunched

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Sea-urchin, conchs and all, unpricked—coarse
brutes !

Command they lead off step, time steady stroke 5640
To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie
Athenai's pride in powder ! ”

Done that day—
That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month !
The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,
The very day Euripides was born, 5645
Those flute-girls—Phaps-Elaphion at their head—
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while
Sparté pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the
works,
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away ! 5650

We would not see its passing. Ere I knew
The issue of their counsels,—crouching low
And shrouded by my peplos,—I conceived,
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears,—by count
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time,— 5655
Athenai's doom was signed and signified
In that assembly,—ay, but knew there watched
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all
The stranger's licensed duty,—speak the word
Allowed the Man from Phokis ! Nought remained 5660
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea
That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.

Help rose to heart's wish ; at the harbour-side, 5665
The old grey mariner did reverence
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

The hospitable port and pushed to sea.
"Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake 5670
Of her and her Euripides!" laughed he.

Rhodes,—shall it not be there, my Euthukles,
Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,
That solitude—two make so populous!—
For food finds memories of the past suffice, 5675
May be, anticipations,—hope so swells,—
Of some great future we, familiar once
With who so taught, should hail and entertain?
He lies now in the little valley, laughed
And moaned about by those mysterious streams, 5680
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly
course.

They mix in Arethousa by his grave.
The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,
Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold. 5685

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so
Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there
Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.
A gold-graved writing tells—"I also loved
The poet, Free Athenai cheaply prized— 5690
King Dionusios,—Archelaos-like!"

And see if young Philemon,—sure one day
To do good service and be loved himself,—
If he too have not made a votive verse!
"Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same, 5695
Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,
I'd hang myself—to see Euripides!"
Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,
But pen the prime plays, labour the right life,
And die at good old age as grand men use,— 5700

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the
while,—

That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!

"He lives!" hark,—waves say, winds sing out
the same,

And yonder dares the citied ridge of Rhodes

Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts 5705

North bay from south,—each guarded calm, that
guest

May enter gladly, blow what wind there will,—

Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!

All in one choros,—what the master-word

They take up?—hark! "There are no gods, no
gods!" 5710

Glory to God—who saves Euripides!"

THE INN ALBUM

THE INN ALBUM

1875

“THAT oblong book ’s the Album ; hand it here !
Exactly ! page on page of gratitude
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view !
I praise these poets : they leave margin-space ;
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around, 5
And primly, trimly, keep the foot’s confine,
Modest and maidlike ; lubber prose o’ersprawls
And straddling stops the path from left to right.
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,
Which poem spares a corner ? What comes first ? 10
‘ Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot ! ’
(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy !)
Or see—succincter beauty, brief and bold—
*‘ If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port wine,
He needs not despair Of dining well here—’* 15
‘ Here ! ’ I myself could find a better rhyme !
That bard ’s a Browning ; he neglects the form :
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense !
Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide !
I ’ll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt. 20
A minute’s fresh air, then to cipher-work !
Three little columns hold the whole account :
Écarté, after which Blind Hookey, then
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.
’T is easy reckoning : I have lost, I think.” 25

THE INN ALBUM

Two personages occupy this room
Shabby-genteel, that 's parlour to the inn
Perched on a view-commanding eminence ;
—Inn which may be a veritable house
Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste 30
Till tourists found his coign of vantage out,
And fingered blunt the individual mark,
And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.
On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag ; 35
His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds ;
They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,
Varnished and coffined, *Salmo ferox* glares
—Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed 40
And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.

So much describes the stuffy little room—
Vulgar flat smooth respectability :
Not so the burst of landscape surging in,
Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair 45
Is, plain enough, the younger personage
Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft
The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall
Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.
He leans into a living glory-bath 50
Of air and light where seems to float and move
The wooded watered country, hill and dale
And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with
mist,
A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed
patch 55
Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close
For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,
This inn is perched above to dominate—

THE INN ALBUM

Except such sign of human neighbourhood,
 (And this surmised rather than sensible) 60
 There 's nothing to disturb absolute peace,
 The reign of English nature—which means art
 And civilized existence. Wildness' self
 Is just the cultured triumph. Presently
 Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place 65
 That knows the right way to defend itself :
 Silence hems round a burning spot of life.
 Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,
 And where a village broods, an inn should
 boast—
 Close and convenient : here you have them both. 70
 This inn, the Something-arms—the family's—
 (Don't trouble Guillim : heralds leave out half !)
 Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,
 And epics have been planned here ; but who plan
 Take holy orders and find work to do. 75
 Painters are more productive, stop a week,
 Declare the prospect quite a Corot,—ay,
 For tender sentiment,—themselves incline
 Rather to handsweep large and liberal ;
 Then go, but not without success achieved 80
 —Haply some pencil-drawing, oak or beech,
 Ferns at the base and ivies up the bole,
 On this a slug, on that a butterfly.
 Nay, he who hooked the *salmo* pendent here,
 Also exhibited, this same May-month, 85
 ' *Foxgloves : a study* '—so inspires the scene,
 The air, which now the younger personage
 Inflates him with till lungs o'erfraught are fain
 Sigh forth a satisfaction might bestir
 Even those tufts of tree-tops to the South 90
 I' the distance where the green dies off to grey,
 Which, easy of conjecture, front the Place ;
 He eyes them, elbows wide, each hand to cheek.

THE INN ALBUM

His fellow, the much older—either say
A youngish-old man or man oldish-young— 95
Sits at the table : wicks are noisome-deep
In wax, to detriment of plated ware ;
Above—piled, strewn—is store of playing-cards,
Counters and all that 's proper for a game.
He sets down, rubs out figures in the book, 100
Adds and subtracts, puts back here, carries there,
Until the summed-up satisfaction stands
Apparent, and he pauses o'er the work :
Soothes what of brain was busy under brow,
By passage of the hard palm, curing so 105
Wrinkle and crowfoot for a second's space ;
Then lays down book and laughs out. No mistake,
Such the sum-total—ask Colenso else !

Roused by which laugh, the other turns, laughs
too—
The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps. 110

“Well, what 's the damage—three, or four, or five?
How many figures in a row? Hand here !
Come now, there 's one expense all yours not
mine—
Scribbling the people's Album over, leaf
The first and foremost too ! You think, perhaps, 115
They 'll only charge you for a brand-new book
Nor estimate the literary loss ?
Wait till the small account comes ! ‘*To one night's
Lodging,*’—for ‘beds,’ they can't say,—‘*pound or so ;
Dinner, Apollinaris,—what they please,*’ 120
Attendance not included ;’ last looms large
‘*Defacement of our Album, late enriched
With*’—let 's see what ! Here, at the window,
though !
Ay, breathe the morning and forgive your luck !

THE INN ALBUM

Fine enough country for a fool like me 125
 To own, as next month I suppose I shall !
 Eh ? True fool's-fortune ! so console yourself.
 Let 's see, however—hand the book, I say !
 Well, you 've improved the classic by romance.
 Queer reading ! Verse with parenthetic prose— 130
'Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot !'
 (Three-two fives) *'life how profitably spent'*
 (Five-nought, five-nine fives) *'yonder humble cot,'*
 (More and more noughts and fives) *'in mild content ;*
And did my feelings find the natural vent 135
In friendship and in love, how blest my lot !'
 Then follow the dread figures—five ! *'Content !'*
 That 's apposite ! Are you content as he—
 Simpkin the sonneteer ? *Ten thousand pounds*
 Give point to his effusion—by so much 140
 Leave me the richer and the poorer you
 After our night's play ; who 's content the most,
 I, you, or Simpkin ?"

So the polished snob.

The elder man, refinement every inch
 From brow to boot-end, quietly replies : 145

“ Simpkin 's no name I know. I had my whim.”

“ Ay, had you ! And such things make friendship
 thick.

Intimates I may boast we were ; henceforth,
 Friends—shall it not be ?—who discard reserve,
 Use plain words, put each dot upon each i, 150
 Till death us twain do part ? The bargain's struck !
 Old fellow, if you fancy—(to begin—)
 I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,
 You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs !
 Because you happen to be twice my age 155
 And twenty times my master, must perforce

THE INN ALBUM

No blink of daylight struggle through the web
 There 's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,
 And welcome, for I like it : blind me,—no!
 A very pretty piece of shuttle-work 160
 Was that—your mere chance question at the club—
' Do you go anywhere this Whitsuntide ?
I 'm off for Paris, there 's the Opera—there 's
The Salon, there 's a china-sale,—beside
Chantilly ; and, for good companionship, 165
There 's Such-and-such and So-and-so. Suppose
We start together ?' ' No such holiday !'
 I told you : *' Paris and the rest be hanged !*
Why plague me who am pledged to home-delights ?
I 'm the engaged now ; through whose fault but yours ? 170
On duty. As you well know. Don't I drowse
The week away down with the Aunt and Niece ?
No help : it 's leisure, loneliness and love.
Wish I could take you ; but fame travels fast,—
A man of much newspaper-paragraph 175
You scare domestic circles ; and beside
Would not you like your lot, that 'second taste
Of nature and approval of the grounds !
You might walk early or lie late, so shirk
Week-day devotions : but stay Sunday o'er, 180
And morning church is obligatory :
No mundane garb permissible, or dread
The butler's privileged monition ! No !
Pack off to Paris, nor wipe tear away !'
 Whereon how artlessly the happy flash 185
 Followed, by inspiration ! *' Tell you what—*
Let 's turn their flank, try things on t' other side !
Inns for my money ! Liberty 's the life !
We 'll lie in hiding : there 's the crow-nest nook,
The tourist's joy, the Inn they rave about, 190
Inn that 's out—out of sight and out of mind
And out of mischief to all four of us—

THE INN ALBUM

*Aunt and niece, you and me. At night arrive ;
At morn, find time for just a Pisgah-view
Of my friend's Land of Promise ; then depart. 195
And while I 'm whizzing onward by first train,
Bound for our own place (since my Brother sulks
And says I shun him like the plague) yourself—
Why, you have stepped thence, start from platform,*

*gay
Despite the sleepless journey,—love lends wings,— 200
Hug aunt and niece who, none the wiser, wait
The faithful advent ! Eh ? ' With all my heart,'
Said I to you ; said I to mine own self :*

*' Does he believe I fail to comprehend
He wants just one more final friendly snack 205*

*At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,
Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport ?'
And did I spoil sport, pull face grim,—nay, grave?
Your pupil does you better credit ! No !*

*I parleyed with my pass-book,—rubbed my pair 210
At the big balance in my banker's hands,—
Folded a cheque cigar-case-shape,—just wants
Filling and signing,—and took train, resolved
To execute myself with decency*

*And let you win—if not Ten thousand quite, 215
Something by way of wind-up-farewell burst
Of firework-nosegay ! Where 's your fortune fled ?
Or is not fortune constant after all ?*

*You lose ten thousand pounds : had I lost half
Or half that, I should bite my lips, I think. 220
You man of marble ! Strut and stretch my best
On tiptoe, I shall never reach your height.
How does the loss feel ! Just one lesson more !"*

The more refined man smiles a frown away.

*" The lesson shall be—only boys like you 225
Put such a question at the present stage.*

THE INN ALBUM

I had a ball lodge in my shoulder once,
And, full five minutes, never guessed the fact ;
Next day, I felt decidedly : and still,
At twelve years' distance, when I lift my arm 230
A twinge reminds me of the surgeon's probe.
Ask me, this day month, how I feel my luck !
And meantime please to stop impertinence,
For—don't I know its object ? All this chaff
Covers the corn, this preface leads to speech, 235
This boy stands forth a hero. ' *There, my lord !
Our play was true play, fun not earnest ! I
Empty your purse, inside out, while my poke
Bulges to bursting ? You can badly spare
A doit, confess now, Duke though brother be !* 240
*While I'm gold-daubed so thickly, spangles drop
And show my father's warehouse-apron : pshaw !
Enough ! We've had a palpitating night !
Good morning ! Breakfast and forget our dreams !
My mouth's shut, mind ! I tell nor man nor mouse.* 245
There, see ! He don't deny it ! Thanks, my boy !
Hero and welcome—only, not on me
Make trial of your 'prentice-hand ! Enough !
We've played, I've lost and owe ten thousand
pounds,
Whereof I muster, at the moment,—well, 250
What's for the bill here and the back to town.
Still, I've my little character to keep :
You may expect your money at month's end."

The young man at the window turns round quick—
A clumsy giant handsome creature ; grasps 255
In his large red the little lean white hand
Of the other, looks him in the sallow face.

"I say now—is it right to so mistake
A fellow, force him in mere self-defence

THE INN ALBUM

To spout like Mister *Mild Acclivity* 260
 In album-language? You know well enough
 Whether I like you—*like* 's no album-word
 Anyhow : point me to one soul beside
 In the wide world I care one straw about !
 I first set eyes on you a year ago ; 265
 Since when you've done me good—I'll stick to it—
 More than I got in the whole twenty-five
 That make my life up, Oxford years and all—
 Throw in the three I fooled away abroad,
 Seeing myself and nobody more sage 270
 Until I met you, and you made me man
 Such as the sort is and the fates allow.
 I do think, since we two kept company,
 I 've learnt to know a little—all through you !
 It 's nature if I like you. Taunt away ! 275
 As if I need you teaching me my place—
 The snob I am, the Duke your brother is,
 When just the good you did was—teaching me
 My own trade, how a snob and millionaire
 May lead his life and let the Duke's alone, 280
 Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steeple-perch,
 Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,
 Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut
 Regular peacocks who can't fly an inch
 Over the courtyard-paling. Head and heart 285
 (That 's album-style) are older than you know,
 For all your knowledge : boy, perhaps—ay, boy
 Had his adventure, just as he were man—
 His ball-experience in the shoulder-blade,
 His bit of life-long ache to recognize, 290
 Although he bears it cheerily about,
 Because you came and clapped him on the back,
 Advised him '*Walk and wear the aching off!*'
 Why, I was minded to sit down for life
 Just in Dalmatia, build a sea-side tower 295

THE INN ALBUM

High on a rock, and so expend my days
 Pursuing chemistry or botany
 Or, very like, astronomy because
 I noticed stars shone when I passed the place :
 Letting my cash accumulate the while 300
 In England—to lay out in lump at last
 As Ruskin should direct me ! All or some
 Of which should I have done or tried to do,
 And preciously repented, one fine day,
 Had you discovered Timon, climbed his rock 305
 And scaled his tower, some ten years thence,
 suppose,
 And coaxed his story from him ! Don't I see
 The pair conversing ! It 's a novel writ
 Already, I 'll be bound,—our dialogue !
 ' *What ?* ' cried the elder and yet youthful man— 310
 So did the eye flash 'neath the lordly front,
 And the imposing presence swell with scorn,
 As the haught high-bred bearing and dispose
 Contrasted with his interlocutor
 The flabby low-born who, of bulk before, 315
 Had steadily increased, one stone per week,
 Since his abstention from horse-exercise :—
 ' *What ?* you, as rich as Rothschild, left, you say,
 London the very year you came of age,
 Because your father manufactured goods— 320
 Commission-agent hight of Manchester—
 Partly, and partly through a baby case
 Of disappointment I 've pumped out at last—
 And here you spend life's prime in gaining flesh
 And giving science one more asteroid ? ' 325
 Brief, my dear fellow, you instructed me.
 At Alfred's and not Istria ! proved a snob
 May turn a million to account although
 His brother be no Duke, and see good days
 Without the girl he lost and someone gained. 330

THE INN ALBUM

The end is, after one year's tutelage,
 Having, by your help, touched society,
 Polo, Tent-Pegging, Hurlingham, the Rink—
 I leave all these delights, by your advice,
 And marry my young pretty cousin here 335
 Whose place, whose oaks ancestral you behold.
 (Her father was in partnership with mine—
 Does not his purchase look a pedigree?)
 My million will be tails and tassels smart
 To this plump-bodied kite, this house and land 340
 Which, set a-soaring, pulls me, soft as sleep,
 Along life's pleasant meadow,—arm left free
 To lock a friend's in,—whose but yours, old boy?
 Arm in arm glide we over rough and smooth,
 While hand, to pocket held, saves cash from cards. 345
 Now, if you don't esteem ten thousand pounds
 (—Which I shall probably discover snug
 Hid somewhere in the column-corner capped
 With '*Credit*,' based on '*Balance*,'—which, I swear,
 By this time next month I shall quite forget 350
 Whether I lost or won—ten thousand pounds,
 Which at this instant I would give . . . let's see,
 For Galopin—nay, for that Gainsborough
 Sir Richard won't sell, and, if bought by me,
 Would get my glance and praise some twice a
 year,—) 355
 Well, if you don't esteem that price dirt-cheap
 For teaching me Dalmatia was mistake—
 Why then, my last illusion-bubble breaks,
 My one discovered phoenix proves a goose,
 My cleverest of all companions—oh, 360
 Was worth nor ten pence nor ten thousand pounds!
 Come! Be yourself again! So endeth here
 The morning's lesson! Never while life lasts
 Do I touch card again. To breakfast now!
 To bed—I can't say, since you needs must start 365

THE INN ALBUM

For station early—oh, the down-train still,
First plan and best plan—townward trip behanged!
You're due at your big brother's—pay that debt,
Then owe me not a farthing! Order eggs—
And who knows but there's trout obtainable?" 370

The fine man looks well-nigh malignant: then—

"Sir, please subdue your manner! Debts are debts:

I pay mine—debts of this sort—certainly.
What do I care how you regard your gains,
Want them or want them not? The thing I want 375
Is—not to have a story circulate
From club to club—how, bent on clearing out
Young So-and-so, young So-and-so cleaned me,
Then set the empty kennel flush again,
Ignored advantage and forgave his friend— 380
For why? There was no wringing blood from
stone!

Oh, don't be savage! You would hold your tongue,
Bite it in two, as man may; but those small
Hours in the smoking-room, when instance apt
Rises to tongue's root, tingles on to tip, 385
And the thinned company consists of six
Capital well-known fellows one may trust!
Next week, it's in the 'World.' No, thank you
much.

I owe ten thousand pounds: I'll pay them!"

"Now,—
This becomes funny. You've made friends with
me: 390

I can't help knowing of the ways and means!
Or stay! they say your brother closets up
Correggio's long-lost Leda: if he means
To give you that, and if you give it me . . ."

THE INN ALBUM

“I polished snob off to aristocrat? 395
 You compliment me! father's apron still
 Sticks out from son's court-vesture; still silk purse
 Roughs finger with some bristle sow-ear-born!
 Well, neither I nor you mean harm at heart!
 I owe you and shall pay you: which premised, 400
 Why should what follows sound like flattery?
 'The fact is—you do compliment too much
 Your humble master, as I own I am;
 You owe me no such thanks as you protest.
 The polisher needs precious stone no less 405
 Than precious stone needs polisher: believe
 I struck no tint from out you but I found
 Snug lying first 'neath surface hair-breadth-deep!
 Beside, I liked the exercise: with skill
 Goes love to show skill for skill's sake. You see, 410
 I'm old and understand things: too absurd
 It were you pitched and tossed away your life,
 As diamond were Scotch-pebble! all the more,
 That I myself misused a stone of price.
 Born and bred clever—people used to say 415
 Clever as most men, if not something more—
 Yet here I stand a failure, cut awry
 Or left opaque,—no brilliant named and known.
 Whate'er my inner stuff, my outside 's blank;
 I'm nobody—or rather, look that same— 420
 I'm—who I am—and know it; but I hold
What in my hand out for the world to see?
 What ministry, what mission, or what book
 —I'll say, book even? Not a sign of these!
 I began—laughing—‘*All these when I like!*’ 425
 I end with—well, you've hit it!—‘*This boy's cheque*
For just as many thousands as he'll spare!’
 The first—I could, and would not; your spare cash
 I would, and could not: have no scruple, pray,
 But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine 430

THE INN ALBUM

—When you are able!”

“Which is—when to be?

I've heard, great characters require a fall
Of fortune to show greatness by uprise :
They touch the ground to jollily rebound,
Add to the Album! Let a fellow share 435
Your secret of superiority!

I know, my banker makes the money breed
Money; I eat and sleep, he simply takes
The dividends and cuts the coupons off,
Sells out, buys in, keeps doubling, tripling cash, 440
While I do nothing but receive and spend.
But you, spontaneous generator, hatch
A wind-egg; cluck, and forth struts Capital
As Interest to me from egg of gold.
I am grown curious : pay me by all means! 445
How will you make the money?”

“Mind your own—

Not my affair. Enough : or money, or
Money's worth, as the case may be, expect
Ere month's end,—keep but patient for a month!
Who's for a stroll to station? Ten's the time; 450
Your man, with my things, follow in the trap;
At stoppage of the down-train, play the arrived
On platform, and you'll show the due fatigue
Of the night-journey,—not much sleep,—perhaps,
Your thoughts were on before you—yes, indeed, 455
You join them, being happily awake
With thought's sole object as she smiling sits
At breakfast-table. I shall dodge meantime
In and out station-precinct, wile away
The hour till up my engine pants and smokes. 460
No doubt, she goes to fetch you. Never fear!
She gets no glance at me, who shame such
saints!”

THE INN ALBUM

II

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart
Amid profuse acknowledgment from host
Who well knows what may bring the younger back. 465
They light cigar, descend in twenty steps
The "*calm acclivity*," inhale—beyond
Tobacco's balm—the better smoke of turf
And wood fire,—cottages at cookery
I' the morning,—reach the main road straitening on 470
'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of night
Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before
The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine
Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently
The road's end with the sky's beginning mix 475
In one magnificence of glare, due East,
So high the sun rides,—May's the merry month.

They slacken pace : the younger stops abrupt,
Discards cigar, looks his friend full in face.

"All right ; the station comes in view at end ; 480
Five minutes from the beech-clump, there you are!
I say : let's halt, let's borrow yonder gate
Of its two magpies, sit and have a talk!
Do let a fellow speak a moment ! More
I think about and less I like the thing— 485
No, you must let me ! Now, be good for once !
Tenthousandpoundsbedonefor,deadanddamned !
We played for love, not hate : yes, hate ! I hate
Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
To strychnine some poor devil of a lord 490
Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash
To lose—you knew that !—lose and none the less
Whistle to-morrow : it's not every chap
Affords to take his punishment so well !

THE INN ALBUM

Now, don't be angry with a friend whose fault 495
 Is that he thinks—upon my soul, I do—
 Your head the best head going. Oh, one sees
 Names in the newspaper—great this, great that,
 Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate :—much I care !
 Others have their opinion, I keep mine : 500
 Which means—by right you ought to have the
 things

I want a head for. Here 's a pretty place,
 My cousin's place, and presently my place,
 Not yours ! I 'll tell you how it strikes a man.
 My cousin 's fond of music and of course 505
 Plays the piano (it won't be for long !)
 A brand-new bore she calls a '*semi-grand*,'
 Rosewood and pearl, that blocks the drawing-room,
 And cost no end of money. Twice a week
 Down comes Herr Somebody and seats himself, 510
 Sets to work teaching—with his teeth on edge—
 I've watched the rascal. '*Does he play first-rate ?*'
 I ask : '*I rather think so*,' answers she—
 '*He's What's-his-Name !*'—'*Why give you lessons*
then ?'—

'*I pay three guineas and the train beside.*'— 515
 '*This instrument, has he one such at home ?*'—
 '*He ? Has to practise on a table-top,*
When he can't hire the proper thing.'—'*I see !*
You've the piano, he the skill, and God
The distribution of such gifts.' So here : 520
 After your teaching, I shall sit and strum
 Polkas on this piano of a Place
 You 'd make resound with *Rule Britannia !*'

“ Thanks !

I don't say but this pretty cousin's place,
 Appendaged with your million, tempts my hand 525
 As key-board I might touch with some effect.”

THE INN ALBUM

“Then, why not have obtained the like? House,
land,
Money, are things obtainable, you see,
By clever head-work : ask my father else !
You, who teach me, why not have learned, yourself? 530
Played like Herr Somebody with power to thump
And flourish and the rest, not bend demure
Pointing out blunders—‘ *Sharp, not natural !*
Permit me—on the black key use the thumb !’
There ’s some fatality, I ’m sure ! You say 535
‘ *Marry the cousin, that ’s your proper move !*’
And I do use the thumb and hit the sharp :
You should have listened to your own head’s hint,
As I to you ! The puzzle ’s past my power,
How you have managed—with such stuff, such
means— 540
Not to be rich nor great nor happy man :
Of which three good things where ’s a sign at all ?
Just look at Dizzy ! Come,—what tripped your
heels ?
Instruct a goose that boasts wings and can’t fly !
I wager I have guessed it !—never found 545
The old solution of the riddle fail !
‘ *Who was the woman ?*’ I don’t ask, but—‘ *Where*
I’ the path of life stood she who tripped you ?’ ”

“Goose

You truly are ! I own to fifty years.
Why don’t I interpose and cut out—you ? 550
Compete with five-and-twenty ? Age, my boy ! ”

“Old man, no nonsense !—even to a boy
That ’s ripe at least for rationality
Rapped into him, as may be mine was, once !
I ’ve had my small adventure lesson me 555
Over the knuckles !—likely, I forget

THE INN ALBUM

The sort of figure youth cuts now and then,
Competing with old shoulders but young head
Despite the fifty grizzling years !”

“Aha ?

Then that means—just the bullet in the blade 560
Which brought Dalmatia on the brain,—that, too,
Came of a fatal creature ? Can’t pretend
Now for the first time to surmise as much !
Make a clean breast ! Recount ! a secret ’s safe
’Twixt you, me and the gate-post !”

“—Can’t pretend, 565

Neither, to never have surmised your wish !
It ’s no use,—case of unextracted ball—
Winces at finger-touching. Let things be !”

“Ah, if you love your love still ! I hate mine.”

“I can’t hate.”

“I won’t teach you ; and won’t tell 570

You, therefore, what you please to ask of me :
As if I, also, may not have my ache !”

“My sort of ache ? No, no ! and yet—perhaps !
All comes of thinking you superior still.
But live and learn ! I say ! Time ’s up ! Good
jump ! 575

You old, indeed ! I fancy there ’s a cut
Across the wood, a grass path : shall we try ?
It ’s venturesome, however !”

“Stop, my boy !

Don’t think I ’m stingy of experience ! Life
—It ’s like this wood we leave. Should you and I 580

THE INN ALBUM

Go wandering about there, though the gaps
We went in and came out by were opposed
As the two poles, still, somehow, all the same,
By nightfall we should probably have chanced
On much the same main points of interest— 585
Both of us measured girth of mossy trunk,
Stript ivy from its strangled prey, clapped hands
At squirrel, sent a fir-cone after crow,
And so forth,—never mind what time betwixt.
So in our lives ; allow I entered mine 590
Another way than you : 't is possible
I ended just by knocking head against
That plaguy low-hung branch yourself began
By getting bump from ; as at last you too
May stumble o'er that stump which first of all 595
Bade me walk circumspectly. Head and feet
Are vulnerable both, and I, foot-sure,
Forgot that ducking down saves brow from bruise.
I, early old, played young man four years since
And failed confoundedly : so, hate alike 600
Failure and who caused failure,—curse her cant ! ”

“ Oh, I see ! You, though somewhat past the
prime,
Were taken with a rosebud beauty ! Ah—
But how should chits distinguish ? She admired
Your marvel of a mind, I 'll undertake ! 605
But as to body . . . nay, I mean . . . that is,
When years have told on face and figure . . . ”

“ Thanks,
Mister *Sufficiently-Instructed* ! Such
No doubt was bound to be the consequence
To suit your self-complacency : she liked 610
My head enough, but loved some heart beneath
Some head with plenty of brown hair a-top

THE INN ALBUM

After my young friend's fashion ! What becomes
Of that fine speech you made a minute since
About the man of middle age you found 615
A formidable peer at twenty-one ?
So much for your mock-modesty ! and yet
I back your first against this second sprout
Of observation, insight, what you please.
My middle age, Sir, had too much success ! 620
It 's odd : my case occurred four years ago—
I finished just while you commenced that turn
I' the wood of life that takes us to the wealth
Of honeysuckle, heaped for who can reach.
Now, I don't boast : it 's bad style, and beside, 625
The feat proves easier than it looks : I plucked
Full many a flower unnamed in that bouquet
(Mostly of peonies and poppies, though !)
Good nature sticks into my button-hole.
Therefore it was with nose in want of snuff 630
Rather than Ess or Psidium, that I chanced
On what—so far from '*rosebud beauty*' . . . Well—
She 's dead : at least you never heard her name ;
She was no courtly creature, had nor birth
Nor breeding—mere fine-lady-breeding ; but 635
Oh, such a wonder of a woman ! Grand
As a Greek statue ! Stick fine clothes on that,
Style that a Duchess or a Queen,—you know,
Artists would make an outcry : all the more,
That she had just a statue's sleepy grace 640
Which broods o'er its own beauty. Nay, her fault
(Don't laugh !) was just perfection : for suppose
Only the little flaw, and I had peeped
Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.
At Rome some tourist raised the grit beneath 645
A Venus' forehead with his whittling-knife—
I wish,—now,—I had played that brute, brought
blood

THE INN ALBUM

To surface from the depths I fancied chalk !
As it was, her mere face surprised so much
That I stopped short there, struck on heap, as
 stares 650
The cockney stranger at a certain bust
With drooped eyes,—she 's the thing I have in
 mind,—
Down at my Brother's. All sufficient prize—
Such outside ! Now,—confound me for a prig !—
Who cares ? I'll make a clean breast once for all ! 655
Beside, you 've heard the gossip. My life long
I 've been a woman-liker,—liking means
Loving and so on. There 's a lengthy list
By this time I shall have to answer for—
So say the good folk : and they don't guess half— 660
For the worst is, let once collecting-itch
Possess you, and, with perspicacity,
Keeps growing such a greediness that theft
Follows at no long distance,—there 's the fact !
I knew that on my Leporello-list 665
Might figure this, that, and the other name
Of feminine desirability,
But if I happened to desire inscribe,
Along with these, the only Beautiful—
Here was the unique specimen to snatch 670
Or now or never. ' Beautiful ' I said—
' Beautiful ' say in cold blood,—boiling then
To tune of '*Haste, secure what'e'er the cost*
This rarity, die in the act, be damned,
So you complete collection, crown your list !' 675
It seemed as though the whole world, once aroused
By the first notice of such wonder's birth,
Would break bounds to contest my prize with me
The first discoverer, should she but emerge
From that safe den of darkness where she dozed 680
Till I stole in, that country-parsonage

THE INN ALBUM

Where, country-parson's daughter, motherless,
Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years
She had been vegetating lily-like.

Her father was my brother's tutor, got 685
The living that way : him I chanced to see—
Her I saw—her the world would grow one eye
To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all !

'Secure her !' cried the devil : *'afterward*
Arrange for the disposal of the prize !' 690

The devil's doing ! yet I seem to think—
Now, when all 's done,—think with *'a head reposed'*
In French phrase—hope I think I meant to do
All requisite for such a rarity

When I should be at leisure, have due time 695
To learn requirement. But in evil day—
Bless me, at week's end, long as any year,
The father must begin *'Young Somebody,*
Much recommended—for I break a rule—
Comes here to read, next Long Vacation.' *'Young !'* 700
That did it. Had the epithet been *'rich,'*
'Noble,' 'a genius,' even *'handsome,'*—but
—*'Young' !*

"I say—just a word ! I want to know—
You are not married ?"

"I ?"

"Nor ever were ?"

"Never ! Why ?"

"Oh, then—never mind ! Go on ! 705
I had a reason for the question."

"Come,—
You could not be the young man ?"

THE INN ALBUM

“No, indeed !
Certainly—if you never married her !”

“That I did not : and there 's the curse, you 'll
see !

Nay, all of it 's one curse, my life's mistake 710
Which, nourished with manure that 's warranted
To make the plant bear wisdom, blew out full
In folly beyond field-flower-foolishness !
The lies I used to tell my womankind,
Knowing they disbelieved me all the time 715
Though they required my lies, their decent due,
This woman—not so much believed, I 'll say,
As just anticipated from my mouth :
Since being true, devoted, constant—she
Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain 720
And easy commonplace of character.
No mock-heroics but seemed natural
To her who underneath the face, I knew
Was fairness' self, possessed a heart, I judged
Must correspond in folly just as far 725
Beyond the common,—and a mind to match,—
Not made to puzzle conjurers like me
Who, therein, proved the fool who fronts you, Sir,
And begs leave to cut short the ugly rest !
' *Trust me !* ' I said : she trusted. ' *Marry me !* ' 730
Or rather, ' *We are married : when, the rite ?* '
That brought on the collector's next-day qualm
At counting acquisition's cost. There lay
My marvel, there my purse more light by much
Because of its late lie-expenditure : 735
Ill-judged such moment to make fresh demand—
To cage as well as catch my rarity !
So, I began explaining. At first word
Outbroke the horror. ' *Then, my truths were lies !* '
I tell you, such an outbreak, such new strange 740

THE INN ALBUM

All-unsuspected revelation—soul
As supernaturally grand as face
Was fair beyond example—that at once
Either I lost—or, if it please you, found
My senses,—stammered somehow—*‘Jest! and*
now, 745
Earnest! Forget all else but—heart has loved,
Does love, shall love you ever! take the hand!’
Not she! no marriage for superb disdain,
Contempt incarnate!”

“Yes, it ’s different,—
It ’s only like in being four years since. 750
I see now!”

“Well, what did disdain do next,
Think you?”

“That ’s past me : did not marry you !—
That ’s the main thing I care for, I suppose.
Turned nun, or what?”

“Why, married in a month
Some parson, some smug crop-haired smooth-
chinned sort 755
Of curate-creature, I suspect,—dived down,
Down, deeper still, and came up somewhere else—
I don’t know where—I’ve not tried much to know,—
In short, she ’s happy : what the clodpoles call
‘Countrified’ with a vengeance! leads the life 760
Respectable and all that drives you mad :
Still—where, I don’t know, and that’s best for both.”

“Well, that she did not like you, I conceive.
But why should you hate her, I want to know?”

“My good young friend,—because or her or else 765
Malicious Providence I have to hate.

THE INN ALBUM

For, what I tell you proved the turning-point
Of my whole life and fortune toward success
Or failure. If I drown, I lay the fault
Much on myself who caught at reed not rope, 770
But more on reed which, with a packthread's pith,
Had buoyed me till the minute's cramp could thaw
And I strike out afresh and so be saved.
It 's easy saying—I had sunk before,
Disqualified myself by idle days 775
And busy nights, long since, from holding hard
On cable, even, had fate cast me such !
You boys don't know how many times men fail
Perforce o' the little to succeed i' the large,
Husband their strength, let slip the petty prey, 780
Collect the whole power for the final pounce.
My fault was the mistaking man's main prize
For intermediate boy's diversion ; clap
Of boyish hands here frightened game away
Which, once gone, goes for ever. Oh, at first 785
I took the anger easily, nor much
Minded the anguish—having learned that storms
Subside, and teapot-tempests are akin.
Time would arrange things, mend whate'er might be
Somewhat amiss ; precipitation, eh ? 790
Reason and rhyme prompt—reparation ! Tiffs
End properly in marriage and a dance !
I said ' We 'll marry, make the past a blank '—
And never was such damnable mistake !
That interview, that laying bare my soul, 795
As it was first, so was it last chance—one
And only. Did I write ? Back letter came
Unopened as it went. Inexorable
She fled, I don't know where, consoled herself
With the smug curate-creature : chop and change ! 800
Sure am I, when she told her shaveling all
His Magdalen's adventure, tears were shed,

THE INN ALBUM

Forgiveness evangelically shown,
'Loose hair and lifted eye,'—as someone says.
And now, he's worshipped for his pains, the sneak!" 805

'Well, but your turning-point of life,—what's here
To hinder you contesting Finsbury
With Orton, next election? I don't see . . ."

"Not you! But I see. Slowly, surely, creeps
Day by day o'er me the conviction—here 810
Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go!
—That with her—may be, for her—I had felt
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all the fancies sluggish here
I' the head that needs the hand she would not take 815
And I shall never lift now. Lo, your wood—
Its turnings which I likened life to! Well,—
There she stands, ending every avenue,
Her visionary presence on each goal
I might have gained had we kept side by side! 820
Still string nerve and strike foot? Her frown
forbids:

The steam congeals once more: I 'm old again!
Therefore I hate myself—but how much worse
Do not I hate who would not understand,
Let me repair things—no, but sent a-slide 825
My folly falteringly, stumblingly
Down, down and deeper down until I drop
Upon—the need of your ten thousand pounds
And consequently loss of mine! I lose
Character, cash, nay, common-sense itself 830
Recounting such a lengthy cock-and-bull
Adventure—lose my temper in the act . . ."

"And lose beside,—if I may supplement
The list of losses,—train and ten-o'clock!

THE INN ALBUM

Hark, pant and puff, there travels the swart sign ! 835
So much the better ! You 're my captive now !
I 'm glad you trust a fellow : friends grow thick
This way—that 's twice said ; we were thickish,
though,
Even last night, and, ere night comes again,
I prophesy good luck to both of us ! 840
For see now !—back to '*balmy eminence*'
Or '*calm acclivity*,' or what 's the word !
Bestow you there an hour, concoct at ease
A sonnet for the Album, while I put
Bold face on, best foot forward, make for house, 845
March in to aunt and niece, and tell the truth—
(Even white-lying goes against my taste
After your little story). Oh, the niece
Is rationality itself ! The aunt—
If she 's amenable to reason too— 850
Why, you stopped short to pay her due respect,
And let the Duke wait (I 'll work well the Duke).
If she grows gracious, I return for you ;
If thunder 's in the 'air, why—bear your doom,
Dine on rump-steaks and port, and shake the dust 855
Of aunty from your shoes as off you go
By evening-train, nor give the thing a thought
How you shall pay me—that 's as sure as fate,
Old fellow ! Off with you, face left about !
Yonder 's the path I have to pad. You see, 860
I 'm in good spirits, God knows why ! Perhaps
Because the woman did not marry you
—Who look so hard at me,—and have the right,
One must be fair and own."

The two stand still

Under an oak.

"Look here !" resumes the youth. 865
"I never quite knew how I came to like

THE INN ALBUM

You—so much—whom I ought not court at all :
 Nor how you had a leaning just to me
 Who am assuredly not worth your pains.
 For there must needs be plenty such as you 870
 Somewhere about,—although I can't say where,—
 Able and willing to teach all you know ;
 While—how can you have missed a score like me
 With money and no wit, precisely each
 A pupil for your purpose, were it—ease 875
 Fool's poke of tutor's *honorarium*-fee ?
 And yet, howe'er it came about, I felt
 At once my master : you as prompt descried
 Your man, I warrant, so was bargain struck.
 Now, these same lines of liking, loving, run 880
 Sometimes so close together they converge—
 Life's great adventures—you know what I mean—
 In people. Do you know, as you advanced,
 It got to be uncommonly like fact
 We two had fallen in with—liked and loved 885
 Just the same woman in our different ways ?
 I began life—poor groundling' as I prove—
 Winged and ambitious to fly high : why not ?
 There's something in 'Don Quixote' to the point,
 My shrewd old father used to quote and praise— 890
 '*Am I born man ?*' asks Sancho : '*being man,*
By possibility I may be Pope !'
 So, Pope I meant to make myself, by step
 And step, whereof the first should be to find
 A perfect woman ; and I tell you this— 895
 If what I fixed on, in the order due
 Of undertakings, as next step, had first
 Of all disposed itself to suit my tread,
 And I had been, the day I came of age,
 Returned at head of poll for Westminster 900
 —Nay, and moreover summoned by the Queen
 At week's end, when my maiden-speech bore fruit

THE INN ALBUM

To form and head a Tory ministry—
 It would not have seemed stranger, no, nor been
 More strange to me, as now I estimate, 905
 Than what did happen—sober truth, no dream.
 I saw my wonder of a woman,—laugh,
 I 'm past that!—in Commemoration-week.
 A plenty have I seen since, fair and foul,—
 With eyes, too, helped by your sagacious wink ; 910
 But one to match that marvel—no least trace,
 Least touch of kinship and community !
 The end was—I did somehow state the fact,
 Did, with no matter what imperfect words,
 One way or other give to understand 915
 That woman, soul and body were her slave
 Would she but take, but try them—any test
 Of will, and some poor test of power beside :
 So did the strings within my brain grow tense
 And capable of . . . hang similitudes ! 920
 She answered kindly but beyond appeal.
' No sort of hope for me, who came too late.
She was another's. ' Love went—mine to her,
Hers just as loyally to someone else.'
 Of course ! I might expect it ! Nature's law— 925
 Given the peerless woman, certainly
 Somewhere shall be the peerless man to match !
 I acquiesced at once, submitted me
 In something of a stupor, went my way.
 I fancy there had been some talk before 930
 Of somebody—her father or the like—
 To coach me in the holidays,—that 's how
 I came to get the sight and speech of her,—
 But I had sense enough to break off sharp,
 Save both of us the pain."

"Quite right there !"

"Eh ? 935

THE INN ALBUM

Quite wrong, it happens! Now comes worst of all!
 Yes, I did sulk aloof and let alone
 The lovers—*I* disturb the angel-mates?"

"Seraph paired off with cherub!"

"Thank you! While

I never plucked up courage to inquire 941
 Who he was, even,—certain-sure of this,
 That nobody I knew of had blue wings
 And wore a star-crown as he needs must do,—
 Some little lady,—plainish, pock-marked girl,—
 Finds out my secret in my woeful face, 945
 Comes up to me at the Apollo Ball,
 And pityingly pours her wine and oil
 This way into the wound: '*Dear f-f-friend,*
Why waste affection thus on—must I say,
A somewhat worthless object? Who's her choice— 950
Irrevocable as deliberate—
Out of the wide world? I shall name no names—
But there's a person in society,
Who, blessed with rank and talent, has grown grey
In idleness and sin of every sort 955
Except hypocrisy: he's thrice her age,
A by-word for "successes with the sex"
As the French say—and, as we ought to say,
Consummately a liar and a rogue,
Since—show me where's the woman won without 960
The help of this one lie which she believes—
That—never mind how things have come to pass,
And let who loves have loved a thousand times—
All the same he now loves her only, loves
Her ever! if by "won" you just mean "sold," 965
That's quite another compact. Well, this scamp,
Continuing descent from bad to worse,
Must leave his fine and fashionable prey

THE INN ALBUM

*(Who—fathered, brothered, husbanded,—are hedged
 About with thorny danger) and apply* 970
*His arts to this poor country ignorance
 Who sees forthwith in the first rag of man
 Her model hero ! Why continue waste
 On such a woman treasures of a heart
 Would yet find solace,—yes, my f-f-friend—* 975
In some congenial—fiddle-diddle-dee ? ’ ’

“ Pray, is the pleasant gentleman described
 Exact the portrait which my ‘ f-f-friends ’
 Recognize as so like ? ’ T is evident
 You half surmised the sweet original 980
 Could be no other than myself, just now !
 Your stop and start were flattering ! ”

“ Of course

Caricature ’ s allowed for in a sketch !
 The longish nose becomes a foot in length,
 The swarthy cheek gets copper-coloured,—still, 985
 Prominent beak and dark-hued skin are facts :
 And ‘ parson’s daughter ’—‘ young man coachable ’—
 ‘ Elderly party ’—‘ four years since ’—were facts
 To fasten on, a moment ! Marriage, though—
 That made the difference, I hope.”

“ All right ! 990

I never married ; wish I had—and then
 Unwish it : people kill their wives, sometimes !
 I hate my mistress, but I ’ m murder-free.
 In your case, where’s the grievance ? You came last,
 The earlier bird picked up the worm. Suppose 995
 You, in the glory of your twenty-one,
 Had happened to precede myself ! ’ t is odds
 But this gigantic juvenility,
 This offering of a big arm’s bony hand—

THE INN ALBUM

I 'd rather shake than feel shake me, I know— 1000
 Had moved *my* dainty mistress to admire
 An altogether new Ideal—deem
 Idolatry less due to life's decline
 Productive of experience, powers mature
 By dint of usage, the made man—no boy 1005
 That 's all to make! I was the earlier bird—
 And what I found, I let fall; what you missed
 Who is the fool that blames you for?"

" Myself—

For nothing, everything! For finding out
 She, whom I worshipped, was a worshipper 1010
 In turn of . . . but why stir up settled mud?
 She married him—the fifty-years-old rake—
 How you have teased the talk from me! At last
 My secret 's told you. I inquired no more,
 Nay, stopped ears when informants unshut mouth; 1015
 Enough that she and he live, deuce take where,
 Married and happy, or else miserable—
 It 's 'Cut-the-pack;' she turned up ace or knave,
 And I left Oxford, England, dug my hole
 Out in Dalmatia, till you drew me thence 1020
 Badger-like,—' *Back to London* ' was the word—
 ' *Do things, a many, there, you fancy hard,*
I 'll undertake are easy! '—the advice.
 I took it, had my twelvemonth's fling with you—
 (Little hand holding large hand pretty tight 1025
 For all its delicacy—eh, my lord?),
 Until when, t' other day, I got a turn
 Somehow and gave up tired: and ' *Rest!* ' bade you,
 ' *Marry your cousin, double your estate,*
And take your ease by all means! ' So, I loll 1030
 On this the springy sofa, mine next month—
 Or should loll, but that you must needs beat rough
 The very down you spread me out so smooth.

THE INN ALBUM

I wish this confidence were still to make !
 Ten thousand pounds? You owe me twice the sum 1035
 For stirring up the black depths ! There 's repose
 Or, at least, silence when misfortune seems
 All that one has to bear ; but folly—yes,
 Folly, it all was ! Fool to be so meek,
 So humble,—such a coward rather say ! 1040
 Fool, to adore the adorer of a fool !
 Not to have faced him, tried (a useful hint)
 My big and bony, here, against the bunch
 Of lily-coloured five with signet-ring,
 Most like, for little-finger's sole defence— 1045
 Much as you flaunt the blazon there ! I grind
 My teeth, that bite my very heart, to think—
 To know I might have made that woman mine
 But for the folly of the coward—know—
 Or what 's the good of my apprenticeship 1050
 This twelvemonth to a master in the art ?
 Mine—had she been mine—just one moment mine
 For honour, for dishonour—anyhow,
 So that my life, instead of stagnant . . . Well,
 You've poked and proved stagnation is not sleep— 1055
 Hang you ! ”

“ Hang *you* for an ungrateful goose !
 All this means—I who since I knew you first
 Have helped you to conceit yourself this cock
 O' the dunghill with all hens to pick and choose—
 Ought to have helped you when shell first was
 chipped 1060
 By chick that wanted prompting ‘ *Use the spur !* ’
 While I was elsewhere putting mine to use.
 As well might I blame you who kept aloof,
 Seeing you could not guess I was alive,
 Never advised me ‘ *Do as I have done—* 1065
Reverence such a jewel as your luck

THE INN ALBUM

Has scratched up to enrich unworthiness !'
As your behaviour was should mine have been,
—Faults which we both, too late, are sorry for :
Opposite ages, each with its mistake ! 1070
'If youth but would—if age but could,' you know.
Don't let us quarrel. Come, we 're—young and
old—
Neither so badly off. Go you your way,
Cut to the Cousin ! I 'll to Inn, await
The issue of diplomacy with Aunt, 1075
And wait my hour on *'calm acclivity'*
In rumination manifold—perhaps
About ten thousand pounds I have to pay !”

III

Now, as the elder lights the fresh cigar
Conducive to resource, and saunteringly 1080
Betakes him to the left-hand backward path,—
While, much sedate, the younger strides away
To right and makes for—landed in lawn
And edged with shrubbery—the brilliant bit
Of Barry's building that 's the Place,—a pair 1085
Of women, at this nick of time, one young,
One very young, are ushered with due pomp
Into the same Inn-parlour—“*disengaged*
Entirely now !” the obsequious landlord smiles,
“*Since the late occupants—whereof but one* 1090
Was quite a stranger”—(smile enforced by bow)
“*Left, a full two hours since, to catch the train,*
Probably for the stranger's sake !” (Bow, smile,
And backing out from door soft-closed behind.)

Woman and girl, the two, alone inside, 1095
Begin their talk : the girl, with sparkling eyes—
“Oh, I forewent him purposely ! but you,

THE INN ALBUM

Who joined at—journeyed from the Junction
here—

I wonder how he failed your notice. Few
Stop at our station : fellow-passengers 1100
Assuredly you were—I saw indeed
His servant, therefore he arrived all right.
I wanted, you know why, to have you safe
Inside here first of all, so dodged about
The dark end of the platform ; that 's his way— 1105
To swing from station straight to avenue
And stride the half a mile for exercise.
I fancied you might notice the huge boy.
He soon gets o'er the distance ; at the house
He 'll hear I went to meet him and have missed ; 1110
He 'll wait. No minute of the hour 's too much
Meantime for our preliminary talk :
First word of which must be—O good beyond
Expression of all goodness—you to come !”

The elder, the superb one, answers slow. 1115

“ There was no helping that. You called for me,
Cried, rather : and my old heart answered you.
Still, thank me ! since the effort breaks a vow—
At least, a promise to myself.”

“ I know !
How selfish get you happy folk to be ! 1120
If I should love my husband, must I needs
Sacrifice straightway all the world to him,
As you do ? Must I never dare leave house
On this dread Arctic expedition, out
And in again, six mortal hours, though you, 1125
You even, my own friend for evermore,
Adjure me—fast your friend till rude love pushed
Poor friendship from her vantage—just to grant

THE INN ALBUM

The quarter of a whole day's company
And counsel? This makes counsel so much more 1130
Need and necessity. For here 's my block
Of stumbling : in the face of happiness
So absolute, fear chills me. If such change
In heart be but love's easy consequence,
Do I love? If to marry mean—let go 1135
All I now live for, should my marriage be?"

The other never once has ceased to gaze
On the great elm-tree in the open, posed
Placidly full in front, smooth bole, broad branch,
And leafage, one green plenitude of May. 1140
The gathered thought runs into speech at last.

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful
Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,
Sun-warmth, dew-coolness,—squirrel, bee and
bird,
High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims 1145
'*Leave earth, there 's nothing better till next step
Heavenward!*'—so, off flies what has wings to
help!"

And henceforth they alternate. Says the girl—

"That 's saved then : marriage spares the early
taste."

"Four years now, since my eye took note of tree!" 1150

"If I had seen no other tree but this
My life long, while yourself came straight, you
said,
From tree which overstretched you and was just
One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held

THE INN ALBUM

Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons, 1155
And magic fruits whereon the angels feed—
I looking out of window on a tree
Like yonder—otherwise well-known, much-liked,
Yet just an English ordinary elm—
What marvel if you cured me of conceit 1160
My elm's bird-bee-and-squirrel tenantry
Was quite the proud possession I supposed ?
And there is evidence you tell me true.
The fairy marriage-tree reports itself
Good guardian of the perfect face and form, 1165
Fruits of four years' protection ! Married friend,
You are more beautiful than ever ! ”

“ Yes :

I think that likely. I could well dispense
With all thought fair in feature, mine or no,
Leave but enough of face to know me by— 1170
With all found fresh in youth except such strength
As lets a life-long labour earn repose
Death sells at just that price, they say ; and so,
Possibly, what I care not for, I keep.”

“ How you must know he loves you ! Chill,
before, 1175
Fear sinks to freezing. Could I sacrifice—
Assured my lover simply loves my soul—
One nose-breadth of fair feature ? No, indeed !
Your own love . . . ”

“ The preliminary hour—
Don't waste it ! ”

“ But I can't begin at once ! 1180
The angel's self that comes to hear me speak
Drives away all the care about the speech.

THE INN ALBUM

What an angelic mystery you are—
 Now—that is certain ! when I knew you first,
 No break of halo and no bud of wing ! 1185
 I thought I knew you, saw you, round and through,
 Like a glass ball ; suddenly, four years since,
 You vanished, how and whither ? Mystery !
 Wherefore ? No mystery at all : you loved,
 Were loved again, and left the world of course : 1190
 Who would not ? Lapped four years in fairyland,
 Out comes, by no less wonderful a chance,
 The changeling, touched athwart her trellised bliss
 Of blush-rose bower by just the old friend's voice
 That 's now struck dumb at her own potency. 1195
 / talk of my small fortunes ? Tell me yours
 Rather ! The fool I ever was—I am,
 You see that : the true friend you ever had,
 You have, you also recognize. Perhaps,
 Giving you all the love of all my heart, 1200
 Nature, that 's niggard in me, has denied
 The after-birth of love there 's someone claims
 —This huge boy, swinging up the avenue ;
 And I want counsel : is defect in me,
 Or him who has no right to raise the love ? 1205
 My cousin asks my hand : he 's young enough,
 Handsome,—my maid thinks,—manly 's more the
 word :
 He asked my leave to '*drop*' the elm-tree there,
 Some morning before breakfast. Gentleness
 Goes with the strength, of course. He's honest too, 1210
 Limpidly truthful. For ability—
 All 's in the rough yet. His first taste of life
 Seems to have somehow gone against the tongue :
 He travelled, tried things—came back, tried still
 more—
 He says he 's sick of all. He 's fond of me 1215
 After a certain careless-earnest way

THE INN ALBUM

I like : the iron 's crude,—no polished steel
 Somebody forged before me. I am rich—
 That 's not the reason, he 's far richer : no,
 Nor is it that he thinks me pretty,—frank 1220
 Undoubtedly on that point ! He saw once
 The pink of face-perfection—oh, not you—
 Content yourself, my beauty !—for she proved
 So thoroughly a cheat, his charmer . . . nay,
 He runs into extremes, I 'll say at once, 1225
 Lest you say ! Well, I understand he wants
 Someone to serve, something to do : and both
 Requisites so abound in me and mine
 That here 's the obstacle which stops consent :
 The smoothness is too smooth, and I mistrust 1230
 The unseen cat beneath the counterpane.
 Therefore I thought '*Would she but judge for me,
 Who, judging for herself succeeded so !*'
 Do I love him, does he love me, do both
 Mistake for knowledge—easy ignorance ? 1235
 Appeal to its proficient in each art !
 I got rough-smooth through a piano-piece,
 Rattled away last week till tutor came,
 Heard me to end, then grunted '*Ach, mein Gott !
 Sagen Sie "easy" ? Every note is wrong.* 1240
*All thumped mit wrist : we 'll trouble fingers now.
 The Fräulein will please roll up Raff again
 And exercise at Czerny for one month !*'
 Am I to roll up cousin, exercise
 At Trollope's novels for one month ? Pronounce ! " 1245

"Now, place each in the right position first,
 Adviser and advised one ! I perhaps
 Am three—nay, four years older ; am, beside,
 A wife : advantages—to balance which,
 You have a full fresh joyous sense of life 1250
 That finds you out life's fit food everywhere,

THE INN ALBUM

Detects enjoyment where I, slow and dull,
Fumble at fault. Already, these four years,
Your merest glimpses at the world without
Have shown you more than ever met my gaze ; 1255
And now, by joyance you inspire joy,—learn
While you profess to teach, and teach, although
Avowedly a learner. I am dazed
Like any owl by sunshine which just sets
The sparrow preening plumage ! Here 's to spy 1260
—Your cousin ! You have scanned him all your life,
Little or much ; I never saw his face.
You have determined on a marriage—used
Deliberation therefore—I 'll believe
No otherwise, with opportunity 1265
For judgment so abounding ! Here stand I—
Summoned to give my sentence, for a whim,
(Well, at first cloud-fleck thrown athwart your blue)
Judge what is strangeness' self to me,—say '*Wed!*'
Or '*Wed not!*' whom you promise I shall judge 1270
Presently, at propitious lunch-time, just
While he carves chicken ! Sends he leg for wing?
That revelation into character
And conduct must suffice me ! Quite as well
Consult with yonder solitary crow 1275
That eyes us from your elm-top !"

“ Still the same !

Do you remember, at the library
We saw together somewhere, those two books
Somebody said were noticeworthy ? One
Lay wide on table, sprawled its painted leaves 1280
For all the world's inspection ; shut on shelf
Reclined the other volume, closed, clasped, locked—
Clear to be let alone. Which page had we
Preferred the turning over of ? You were,
Are, ever will be the locked lady, hold 1285

THE INN ALBUM

Inside you secrets written,—soul-absorbed,
 My ink upon your blotting-paper. *I—*
 What trace of you have I to show in turn ?
 Delicate secrets ! No one juvenile
 Ever essayed at croquet and performed 1290
 Superiorly but I confided you
 The sort of hat he wore and hair it held.
 While you ? One day a calm note comes by post :
 ‘ *I am just married, you may like to hear.* ’
 Most men would hate you, or they ought ; we love 1295
 What we fear,—*I* do ! ‘ *Cold* ’ I shall expect
 My cousin calls you. *I—*dislike not him,
 But (if I comprehend what loving means)
 Love you immeasurably more—more—more
 Than even he who, loving you his wife, 1300
 Would turn up nose at who impertinent,
 Frivolous, forward—*loves* that excellence
 Of all the earth he bows in worship to !
 And who ’s this paragon of privilege ?
 Simply a country parson : his the charm 1305
 That worked the miracle ! Oh, too absurd
 But that you stand before me as you stand !
 Such beauty does prove something, everything !
 Beauty ’s the prize-flower which dispenses eye
 From peering into what has nourished root— 1310
 Dew or manure : the plant best knows its place.
 Enough, from teaching youth and tending age
 And hearing sermons,—haply writing tracts,—
 From such strange love-besprinkled compost, lo,
 Out blows this triumph ! Therefore love ’s the soil 1315
 Plants find or fail of. You, with wit to find,
 Exercise wit on the old friend’s behalf,
 Keep me from failure ! Scan and scrutinize
 This cousin ! Surely he ’s as worth your pains
 To study as my elm-tree, crow and all, 1320
 You still keep staring at. *I read your thoughts.* ”

THE INN ALBUM

“ At last ? ”

“ At first ! ‘ *Would, tree, a-top of thee
I winged were, like crow perched moveless there,
And so could straightway soar, escape this bore,
Back to my nest where broods whom I love best—* 1325
The parson o'er his parish—garish—varish—
Oh I could bring the rhyme in if I tried :
The Album here inspires me ! Quite apart
From lyrical expression, have I read
The stare aright, and sings not soul just so ? ” 1330

“ Or rather so ? ‘ *Cool comfortable elm
That men make coffins out of,—none for me
At thy expense, so thou permit I glide
Under thy ferny feet, and there sleep, sleep,
Nor dread awaking though in heaven itself ! ’ ” 1335*

The younger looks with face struck sudden white.
The elder answers its inquiry.

“ Dear,
You are a guesser, not a ‘ *clairvoyante*. ’
I ’ll so far open you the locked and shelved
Volume, my soul, that you desire to see, 1340
As let you profit by the title-page——”

“ *Paradise Lost* ? ”

“ *Inferno* !—All which comes
Of tempting me to break my vow. Stop here !
Friend, whom I love the best in the whole world,
Come at your call, be sure that I will do 1345
All your requirement—see and say my mind.
It may be that by sad apprenticeship
I have a keener sense : I ’ll task the same.
Only indulge me—here let sight and speech

THE INN ALBUM

Happen—this Inn is neutral ground, you know ! 1350
 I cannot visit the old house and home,
 Encounter the old sociality
 Abjured for ever. Peril quite enough
 In even this first—last, I pray it prove—
 Renunciation of my solitude ! 1355
 Back, you, to house and cousin ! Leave me here,
 Who want no entertainment, carry still
 My occupation with me. While I watch
 The shadow inching round those ferny feet,
 Tell him '*A school-friend wants a word with me* 1360
Up at the inn : time, tide and train won't wait :
I must go see her—on and off again—
You 'll keep me company ?' Ten minutes' talk,
 With you in presence, ten more afterward
 With who, alone, convoys me station-bound, 1365
 And I see clearly—and say honestly
 To-morrow : pen shall play tongue's part, you know.
 Go—quick ! for I have made our hand-in-hand
 Return impossible. So scared you look,—
 If cousin does not greet you with '*What ghost* 1370
Has crossed your path ?' I set him down obtuse."

And after one more look, with face still white,
 The younger does go, while the elder stands
 Occupied by the elm at window there.

IV

Occupied by the elm ; and, as its shade 1375
 Has crept clock-hand-wise till it ticks at fern
 Five inches further to the South, the door
 Opens abruptly, someone enters sharp,
 The elder man returned to wait the youth :
 Never observes the room's new occupant, 1380
 Throws hat on table, stoops quick, elbow-propped

THE INN ALBUM

Over the Album wide there, bends down brow
A cogitative minute, whistles shrill,
Then,—with a cheery-hopeless laugh-and-lose
Air of defiance to fate visibly 1385
Casting the toils about him,—mouths once more
“*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*”
Then clasps-to cover, sends book spinning off
T’ other side table, looks up, starts erect
Full-face with her who,—roused from that abstruse 1390
Question, “*Will next tick tip the fern or no?*”,—
Fronts him as fully.

All her languor breaks,
 Away withers at once the weariness
 From the black-blooded brow, anger and hate
 Convulse. Speech follows slower, but at last— 1395

"You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!
 Knew, by some subtle undividable
 Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,
 Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave
 Safe hiding and come take of him arrears, 1400
 My torment due on four years' respite! Time
 To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'er wound!
 Have your success! Be satisfied this sole
 Seeing you has undone all heaven could do
 These four years, puts me back to you and hell! 1405
 What will next trick be, next success? No doubt
 When I shall think to glide into the grave,
 There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,
 And catch and capture me for evermore!
 But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all! 1410
 Contest him for me! Strive, for he is strong!"

Already his surprise dies palely out
In laugh of acquiescing impotence.
He neither gasps nor hisses : calm and plain—

THE INN ALBUM

"I also felt and knew—but otherwise ! 1415
You out of hand and sight and care of me
 These four years, whom I felt, knew, all the while . . .
 Oh, it 's no superstition ! It 's a gift
 O' the gamester that he snuffs the unseen powers
 Which help or harm him. Well I knew what lurked, 1420
 Lay perdue paralysing me,—drugged, drowsed
 And damnified my soul and body both !
 Down and down, seewhere you have dragged me to,
 You and your malice ! I was, four years since,
 —Well, a poor creature ! I become a knave. 1425
 I squandered my own pence : I plump my purse
 With other people's pounds. I practised play
 Because I liked it : play turns labour now
 Because there 's profit also in the sport.
 I gamed with men of equal age and craft : 1430
 I steal here with a boy as green as grass
 Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure
 This long while, just to bring about to-day
 When the boy beats me hollow, buries me
 In ruin who was sure to beggar him. 1435
 O time indeed I should look up and laugh
 '*Surely she closes on me !*' Here you stand !"

And stand she does : while volubility,
 With him, keeps on the increase, for his tongue
 After long locking-up is loosed for once. 1440

"Certain the taunt is happy !" he resumes :
 "So, I it was allured you—only I
 —I, and none other—to this spectacle—
 Your triumph, my despair—you woman-fiend
 That front me ! Well, I have my wish, then ! See 1445
 The low wide brow oppressed by sweeps of hair
 Darker and darker as they coil and swathe
 The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes
 burn black

THE INN ALBUM

Not asleep now ! not pin-points dwarfed beneath
 Either great bridging eyebrow—poor blank beads— 1450
 Babies, I 've pleased to pity in my time :
 How they protrude and glow immense with hate !
 The long triumphant nose attains—retains
 Just the perfection ; and there 's scarlet-skein
 My ancient enemy, her lip and lip, 1455
 Sense-free, sense-frighting lips clenched cold and
 bold

Because of chin, that based resolve beneath !
 Then the columnar neck completes the whole
 Greek-sculpture-baffling body ! Do I see ?
 Can I observe ? You wait next word to come ? 1460
 Well, wait and want ! since no one blight I bid
 Consume one least perfection. Each and all,
 As they are rightly shocking now to me,
 So may they still continue ! Value them ?
 Ay, as the vendor knows the money-worth 1465
 Of his Greek statue, fools aspire to buy,
 And he to see the back of ! Let us laugh !
 You have absolved me from my sin at least !
 You stand stout, strong, in the rude health of
 hate,

No touch of the tame timid nullity 1470
 My cowardice, forsooth, has practised on !
 Ay, while you seemed to hint some fine fifth act
 Of tragedy should freeze blood, end the farce,
 I never doubted all was joke. I kept,
 May be, an eye alert on paragraphs, 1475
 Newspaper-notice,—let no inquest slip,
 Accident, disappearance : sound and safe
 Were you, my victim, not of mind to die !
 So, my worst fancy that could spoil the smooth
 Of pillow, and arrest descent of sleep 1480
 Was, *Into what dim hole can she have dived,*
She and her wrongs, her woe that 's wearing flesh

THE INN ALBUM

And blood away ?' Whereas, see, sorrow swells !
Or, fattened, fulsome, have you fed on me,
Sucked out my substance ? How much gloss, I
pray, 1485
O'erbloomed those hair-swathes when there crept
from you
To me that craze, else unaccountable,
Which urged me to contest our county-seat
With whom but my own brother's nominee ?
Did that mouth's pulp glow ruby from carmine 1490
While I misused my moment, pushed,—one
word,—
One hair's breadth more of gesture,—idiot-like
Past passion, floundered on to the grotesque,
And lost the heiress in a grin ? At least,
You made no such mistake ! You tickled fish, 1495
Landed your prize the true artistic way !
How did the smug young curate rise to tune
Of 'Friend, a fatal fact divides us. Love
Suits me no longer. I have suffered shame,
Betrayal : past is past ; the future—yours— 1500
Shall never be contaminate by mine.
I might have spared me this confession, not
—Oh, never by some hideousest of lies,
Easy, impenetrable ! No ! but say,
By just the quiet answer—" I am cold." 1505
Falsehood avault, each shadow of thee, hence !
Had happier fortune willed . . . but dreams are vain.
Now, leave me—yes, for pity's sake !' Aha,
Who fails to see the curate as his face
Reddened and whitened, wanted handkerchief 1510
At wrinkling brow and twinkling eye, until
Out burst the proper 'Angel, whom the fiend
Has thought to smirch,—thy whiteness, at one wipe
Of holy cambric, shall disgrace the swan !
Mine be the task' . . . and so forth ! Fool ? not he ! 1515

THE INN ALBUM

Cunning in flavours, rather ! What but sour
 Suspected makes the sweetness doubly sweet,
 And what stings love from faint to flamboyant
 But the fear-sprinkle ? Even horror helps—
'Love's flame in me by such recited wrong 1520
Drenched, quenched, indeed ? It burns the fiercelier
thence !'

Why, I have known men never love their wives
 Till somebody—myself, suppose—had *'drenched*
And quenched love,' so the blockheads whined: as if
 The fluid fire that lifts the torpid limb 1525
 Were a wrong done to palsy. But I thrilled
 No palsied person : half my age, or less,
 The curate was, I 'll wager : o'er young blood
 Your beauty triumphed ! Eh, but—was it *he* ?
 Then, it *was* he, I heard of ! None beside ! 1530
 How frank you were about the audacious boy
 Who fell upon you like a thunderbolt—
 Passion and protestation ! He it was
 Reserved *in petto* ! Ay, and *'rich'* beside—
'Rich'—how supremely did disdain curl nose ! 1535
 All that I heard was—*'wedded to a priest ;'*
 Informants sunk youth, riches and the rest.
 And so my lawless love disparted loves,
 That loves might come together with a rush !
 Surely this last achievement sucked me dry : 1540
 Indeed, that way my wits went. Mistress-queen,
 Be merciful and let your subject slink
 Into dark safety ! He 's a beggar, see—
 Do not turn back his ship, Australia-bound,
 And bid her land him right amid some crowd 1545
 Of creditors, assembled by your curse !
 Don't cause the very rope to crack (you can !)
 Whereon he spends his last (friend's) sixpence, just
 The moment when he hoped to hang himself !
 Be satisfied you beat him !"

THE INN ALBUM

She replies— 1550

“Beat him! I do. To all that you confess
Of abject failure, I extend belief.
Your very face confirms it : God is just !
Let my face—fix your eyes !—in turn confirm
What I shall say. All-abject 's but half truth ; 1555
Add to all-abject knave as perfect fool !
So is it you probed human nature, *so*
Prognosticated of me ? Lay these words
To heart then, or where God meant heart should
lurk !

That moment when you first revealed yourself, 1560
My simple impulse prompted—end forthwith
The ruin of a life uprooted thus

To surely perish ! How should such spoiled tree
Henceforward baulk the wind of its worst sport,
Fail to go falling deeper, falling down 1565

From sin to sin until some depth were reached
Doomed to the weakest by the wickedest
Of weak and wicked human kind ? But when,
That self-display made absolute,—behold

A new revelation !—round you pleased to veer, 1570
Propose me what should prompt annul the past,
Make me '*amends by marriage*'—in your phrase,

Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,
With soul and body which mere brushing past
Brought leprosy upon me—'*marry*' these ! 1575

Why, then despair broke, re-assurance dawned,
Clear-sighted was I that who hurled contempt
As I—thank God !—at the contemptible,

Was scarce an utter weakling. Rent away
By treason from my rightful pride of place, 1580
I was not destined to the shame below.

A cleft had caught me : I might perish there,
But thence to be dislodged and whirled at last

THE INN ALBUM

Where the black torrent sweeps the sewage—no !
'Bare breast be on hard rock,' laughed out my soul 1585
 In gratitude, *'howe'er rock's grip may grind !*
The plain rough wretched holdfast shall suffice
This wreck of me !' The wind,—I broke in bloom
 At passage of,—which stripped me bole and branch,
 Twisted me up and tossed me here,—turns back, 1590
 And, playful ever, would replant the spoil ?
 Be satisfied, not one least leaf that 's mine
 Shall henceforth help wind's sport to exercise !
 Rather I give such remnant to the rock
 Which never dreamed a straw would settle there. 1595
 Rock may not thank me, may not feel my breast,
 Even : enough that *I* feel, hard and cold,
 Its safety my salvation. Safe and saved,
 I lived, live. When the tempter shall persuade
 His prey to slip down, slide off, trust the wind,— 1600
 Now that I know if God or Satan be
 Prince of the Power of the Air,—then, then, indeed,
 Let my life end and degradation too !"

"Good !" he smiles, "true Lord Byron ! *'Tree*
and rock :'
'Rock'—there 's advancement ! He 's at first a 1605
 youth,
 Rich, worthless therefore ; next he grows a priest :
 Youth, riches prove a notable resource,
 When to leave me for their possessor gluts
 Malice abundantly ; and now, last change,
 The young rich parson represents a rock 1610
 —Bloodstone, no doubt. He 's Evangelical ?
 Your Ritualists prefer the Church for spouse !"

She speaks.

"I have a story to relate.
 There was a parish-priest, my father knew,

THE INN ALBUM

Elderly, poor : I used to pity him Before I learned what woes are pity-worth. Elderly was grown old now, scanty means Were straitening fast to poverty, beside The ailments which await in such a case. Limited every way, a perfect man	1615 1620
Within the bounds built up and up since birth Breast-high about him till the outside world Was blank save o'erhead one blue bit of sky— Faith : he had faith in dogma, small or great, As in the fact that if he clave his skull He 'd find a brain there : who proves such a fact No falsehood by experiment at price Of soul and body ? The one rule of life Delivered him in childhood was ' <i>Obey !</i> <i>Labour !</i> ' He had obeyed and laboured—tame,	1625 1630
True to the mill-track blinked on from above. Some scholarship he may have gained in youth : Gone—dropt or flung behind. Some blossom-flake, Spring's boon, descends on every vernal head, I used to think ; But January joins December, as his year had known no May Trouble its snow-deposit,—cold and old ! I heard it was his will to take a wife, A helpmate. Duty bade him tend and teach— How ? with experience null, nor sympathy Abundant,—while himself worked dogma dead, Who would play ministrant to sickness, age, Womankind, childhood ? These demand a wife. Supply the want, then ! theirs the wife ; for him— No coarsest sample of the proper sex But would have served his purpose equally With God's own angel,—let but knowledge match Her coarseness : zeal does only half the work. I saw this—knew the purblind honest drudge Was wearing out his simple blameless life,	1635 1640 1645 1650

THE INN ALBUM

And wanted help beneath a burthen—borne
 To treasure-house or dust-heap, what cared I ?
 Partner he needed : I proposed myself,
 Nor much surprised him—duty was so clear !
 Gratitude ? What for ? Gain of Paradise— 1655
 Escape, perhaps, from the dire penalty
 Of who hides talent in a napkin ? No :
 His scruple was—should I be strong enough
 —In body ? since of weakness in the mind,
 Weariness in the heart—no fear of these ! 1660
 He took me as these Arctic voyagers
 Take an aspirant to their toil and pain :
 Can he endure them ?—that 's the point, and not
 —Will he ? Who would not, rather ! Where-
 upon,
 I pleaded far more earnestly for leave 1665
 To give myself away, than you to gain
 What you called priceless till you gained the heart
 And soul and body ! which, as beggars serve
 Extorted alms, you straightway spat upon.
 Not so my husband,—for I gained my suit, 1670
 And had my value put at once to proof.
 Ask him ! These four years I have died away
 In village-life. The village ? Ugliness
 At best and filthiness at worst, inside.
 Outside, sterility—earth sown with salt 1675
 Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.
 The life ? I teach the poor and learn, myself,
 That commonplace to such stupidity
 Is all-recondite. Being brutalized
 Their true need is brute-language, cheery grunts 1680
 And kindly cluckings, no articulate
 Nonsense that 's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the
 sick,
 Sickened myself at pig-perversity,
 Cat-craft dog-snarling,—may be, snapping . . .”

THE INN ALBUM

“ Brief :

You eat that root of bitterness called Man 1685
—Raw : I prefer it cooked, with social sauce !
So, he was not the rich youth after all !
Well, I mistook. But somewhere needs must be
The compensation. If not young nor rich . . .”

“ You interrupt.”

“ Because you 've daubed enough 1690
Bistre for background. Play the artist now,
Produce your figure well-relieved in front !
The contrast—do not I anticipate?
Though neither rich nor young—what then?
'T is all
Forgotten, all this ignobility, 1695
In the dear home, the darling word, the smile,
The something sweeter . . .”

“ Yes, you interrupt.
I have my purpose and proceed. Who lives
With beasts assumes beast-nature, look and voice,
And, much more, thought, for beasts think. Selfish-
ness 1700
In us met selfishness in them, deserved
Such answer as it gained. My husband, bent
On saving his own soul by saving theirs,—
They, bent on being saved if saving soul
Included body's getting bread and cheese 1705
Somehow in life and somehow after death,—
Both parties were alike in the same boat,
One danger, therefore one equality.
Safety induces culture : culture seeks
To institute, extend and multiply 1710
The difference between safe man and man,
Able to live alone now ; progress means

THE INN ALBUM

What but abandonment of fellowship?
We were in common danger, still stuck close.
No new books,—were the old ones mastered yet? 1715
No pictures and no music : these divert
—What from? the staving danger off! You paint
The waterspout above, you set to words
The roaring of the tempest round you? Thanks!
Amusement? Talk at end of the tired day 1720
Of the more tiresome morrow! I transcribed
The page on page of sermon-scrawlings—stopped
Intellect's eye and ear to sense and sound—
Vainly : the sound and sense would penetrate
To brain and plague there in despite of me 1725
Maddened to know more moral good were done
Had we two simply sallied forth and preached
I' the '*Green*' they call their grimy,—I with twang
Of long-disused guitar,—with cut and slash
Of much-misvalued horsewhip he,—to bid 1730
The peaceable come dance, the peace-breaker
Pay in his person! Whereas—Heaven and Hell,
Excite with that, restrain with this! So dealt
His drugs my husband ; as he dosed himself,
He drenched his cattle : and, for all my part 1735
Was just to dub the mortar, never fear
But drugs, hand pestled at, have poisoned nose!
Heaven he let pass, left wisely undescribed :
As applicable therefore to the sleep
I want, that knows no waking—as to what 's 1740
Conceived of as the proper prize to tempt
Souls less world-weary : there, no fault to find!
But Hell he made explicit. After death,
Life : man created new, ingeniously
Perfect for a vindictive purpose now 1745
That man, first fashioned in beneficence,
Was proved a failure ; intellect at length
Replacing old obtuseness, memory

THE INN ALBUM

Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds
 Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay 1750
 Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart ;
 New gift of observation up and down
 And round man's self, new power to apprehend
 Each necessary consequence of act
 In man for well or ill—things obsolete— 1755
 Just granted to supplant the idiocy
 Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,
 With ill or well momentarily its fruit ;
 A faculty of immense suffering
 Conferred on mind and body,—mind, erewhile 1760
 Unvisited by one compunctious dream
 During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,
 Stung through and through by sin's significance
 Now that the holy was abolished—just
 As body which, alive, broke down beneath 1765
 Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,
 Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,
 Achieve aught worthy,—which grew old in youth,
 And at its longest fell a cut-down flower,—
 Dying, this too revived by miracle 1770
 To bear no end of burthen now that back
 Supported torture to no use at all,
 And live imperishably potent—since
 Life's potency was impotent to ward
 One plague off which made earth a hell before. 1775
 This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,
 One sane sight of the general ordinance—
 Nature,—and its particular object,—man,—
 Which one mere eye-cast at the character
 Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot, 1780
 Had dissipated once and evermore,—
 This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.
 Why? Because none believed it. *They* desire
 Such Heaven and dread such Hell, whom every day

THE INN ALBUM

The alehouse tempts from one, a dog-fight bids 1785
Defy the other? All the harm is done
Ourselves—done my poor husband who in youth
Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still
Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I
lead—

Thanks to you, knave! You learn its quality— 1790
Thanks to me, fool!"

He eyes her earnestly,
But she continues.

“—Life which, thanks once more
To you, arch-knave as exquisitest fool,
I acquiescingly—I gratefully
Take back again to heart! and hence this speech 1795
Which yesterday had spared you. Four years long
Life—I began to find intolerable,
Only this moment. Ere your entry just,
The leap of heart which answered, spite of me.
A friend's first summons, first provocative, 1800
Authoritative, nay, compulsive call
To quit, though for a single day, my house
Of bondage—made return seem horrible.
I heard again a human lucid laugh
All trust, no fear; again saw earth pursue 1805
Its narrow busy way amid small cares,
Smaller contentments, much weeds, some few
flowers,—
Never suspicious of a thunderbolt
Avenging presently each daisy's death.
I recognized the beech-tree, knew the thrush 1810
Repeated his old music-phrase,—all right,
How wrong was I, then! But your entry broke
Illusion, bade me back to bounds at once.
I honestly submit my soul: which sprang
At love, and losing love lies signed and sealed 1815

THE INN ALBUM

'*Failure.*' No love more? then, no beauty more
Which tends to breed love! Purify my powers,
Effortless till some other world procure
Some other chance of prize! or, if none be,—
Nor second world nor chance,—undesecrate 1820
Die then this aftergrowth of heart, surmised
Where May's precipitation left June blank!
Better have failed in the high aim, as I,
Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed
As, God be thanked, I do not! Ugliness 1825
Had I called beauty, falsehood—truth, and you
—My lover! No—this earth's unchanged for me,
By his enchantment whom God made the Prince
O' the Power o' the Air, into a Heaven: there is
Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation—earth. 1830
I sit possessed in patience; prison-roof
Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead."

His smile is done with; he speaks bitterly.

"Take my congratulations, and permit
I wish myself had proved as teachable! 1835
—Or, no! until you taught me, could I learn
A lesson from experience ne'er till now
Conceded? Please you listen while I show
How thoroughly you estimate my worth
And yours—the immeasurably superior! I 1840
Believed at least in one thing, first to last,—
Your love to me: I was the vile and you
The precious; I abused you, I betrayed,
But doubted—never! Why else go my way
Judas-like plodding to this Potter's Field 1845
Where fate now finds me? What has dinned my ear
And dogged my step? The spectre with the shriek
'*Such she was, such were you, whose punishment
Is just!*' And such she was not, all the while!
She never owned a love to outrage, faith 1850

THE INN ALBUM

To pay with falsehood ! For, my heart knows this—
Love once and you love always. Why, it 's down
Here in the Album : every lover knows
Love may use hate but—turn to hate, itself—
Turn even to indifference—no, indeed ! 1855
Well, I have been spell-bound, deluded like
The witless negro by the Obeah-man
Who bids him wither : so, his eye grows dim,
His arm slack, arrow misses aim and spear
Goes wandering wide,—and all the woe because 1860
He proved untrue to Fetish, who, he finds,
Was just a feather-phantom ! I wronged love,
Am ruined,—and there was no love to wrong !”

“No love ? Ah, dead love ! I invoke thy ghost
To show the murderer where thy heart poured life 1865
At summons of the stroke he doubts was dealt
On pasteboard and pretence ! Not love, my love ?
I changed for you the very laws of life :
Made you the standard of all right, all fair.
No genius but you could have been, no sage, 1870
No sufferer—which is grandest—for the truth !
My hero—where the heroic only hid
To burst from hiding, brighten earth one day !
Age and decline were man's maturity ;
Face, form were nature's type : more grace, more
strength, 1875
What had they been but just superfluous gauds,
Lawless divergence ? I have danced through day
On tiptoe at the music of a word,
Have wondered where was darkness gone as night
Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile ! 1880
Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat
Your fancied presence ; in companionship,
I kept my finger constant to your glove
Glued to my breast ; then—where was all the world ?

THE INN ALBUM

I schemed—not dreamed—how I might die some
death 1885
Should save your finger aching ! Who creates
Destroys, he only : I had laughed to scorn
Whatever angel tried to shake my faith
And make you seem unworthy : you yourself
Only could do that ! With a touch 't was done. 1890
' *Give me all, trust me wholly !* ' At the word,
I did give, I did trust—and thereupon
The touch did follow. Ah, the quiet smile,
The masterfully-folded arm in arm,
As trick obtained its triumph one time more ! 1895
In turn, my soul too triumphs in defeat :
Treason like faith moves mountains : love is gone !"

He paces to and fro, stops, stands quite close
And calls her by her name. Then—

“ God forgives :
Forgive you, delegate of God, brought near 1900
As never priests could bring him to this soul
That prays you both—forgive me ! I abase—
Know myself mad and monstrous utterly
In all I did that moment ; but as God
Gives me this knowledge—heart to feel and tongue 1905
To testify—so be you gracious too !
Judge no man by the solitary work
Of—well, they do say and I can believe—
The devil in him : his, the moment,—mine
The life—your life ! ”

He names her name again. 1910

“ You were just—merciful as just, you were
In giving me no respite : punishment
Followed offending. Sane and sound once more,

THE INN ALBUM

The patient thanks decision, promptitude,
Which flung him prone and fastened him from hurt, 1915
Haply to others, surely to himself.
I wake and would not you had spared one pang.
All 's well that ends well !”

Yet again her name.

“ Had *you* no fault ? Why must you change, for-
sooth,
Parts, why reverse positions, spoil the play ? 1920
Why did your nobleness look up to me,
Not down on the ignoble thing confessed ?
Was it your part to stoop, or lift the low ?
Wherefore did God exalt you ? Who would teach
The brute man's tameness and intelligence 1925
Must never drop the dominating eye :
Wink—and what wonder if the mad fit break,
Followed by stripes and fasting ? Sound and sane,
My life, chastised now, couches at your foot.
Accept, redeem me ! Do your eyes ask ‘ *How ?* ’ 1930
I stand here penniless, a beggar ; talk
What idle trash I may, this final blow
Of fortune fells me. *I* disburse, indeed,
This boy his winnings ? when each bubble-scheme
That danced athwart my brain, a minute since, 1935
The worse the better,—of repairing straight
My misadventure by fresh enterprise,
Capture of other boys in foolishness
His fellows,—when these fancies fade away
At first sight of the lost so long, the found 1940
So late, the lady of my life, before
Whose presence I, the lost, am also found
Incapable of one least touch of mean
Expedient, I who teemed with plot and wile—
That family of snakes your eye bids flee ! 1945

THE INN ALBUM

Listen ! Our troublesomest dreams die off
In daylight : I awake, and dream is—where ?
I rouse up from the past : one touch dispels
England and all here. I secured long since
A certain refuge, solitary home 1950
To hide in, should the head strike work one day,
The hand forget its cunning, or perhaps
Society grow savage,—there to end
My life's remainder, which, say what fools will,
Is or should be the best of life,—its fruit, 1955
All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.
Come with me, love, loved once, loved only, come,
Blend loves there ! Let this parenthetic doubt
Of love, in me, have been the trial-test
Appointed to all flesh at some one stage 1960
Of soul's achievement,—when the strong man
doubts
His strength, the good man whether goodness be,
The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find
Vocation, and the saint forswears his shrine.
What if the lover may elude, no more 1965
Than these, probative dark, must search the sky
Vainly for love, his soul's star ? But the orb
Breaks from eclipse : I breathe again : I love !
Tempted, I fell ; but fallen—fallen lie
Here at your feet, see ! Leave this poor pretence 1970
Of union with a nature and its needs
Repugnant to your needs and nature ! Nay,
False, beyond falsity you reprehend
In me, is such mock marriage with such mere
Man-mask as—whom you witless wrong, beside, 1975
By that expenditure of heart and brain
He recks no more of than would yonder tree
If watered with your life-blood : rains and dews
Answer its ends sufficiently, while me
One drop saves—sends to flower and fruit at last 1980

THE INN ALBUM

The laggard virtue in the soul which else
Cumbers the ground! Quicken me! Call me
yours—

Yours and the world's—yours and the world's and
God's!

Yes, for you can, you only! Think! Confirm
Your instinct! Say, a minute since, I seemed 1985

The castaway you count me,—all the more

Apparent shall the angelic potency

Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps

To light and life and love!—that's love for you—

Love that already dares match might with yours. 1990

You loved one worthy,—in your estimate,—

When time was; you desried the unworthy taint,

And where was love then? No such test could e'er

Try my love: but you hate me and revile;

Hatred, revilement—had you these to bear 1995

Would you, as I do, nor revile, nor hate,

But simply love on, love the more, perchance?

Abide by your own proof! '*Your love was love:*

Its ghost knows no forgetting!' "Heart of mine,

Would that I dared remember! Too unwise 2000

Were he who lost a treasure, did himself

Enlarge upon the sparkling catalogue

Of gems to her his queen who trusted late

The keeper of her caskets! Can it be

That I, custodian of such relic still 2005

As your contempt permits me to retain,

All I dare hug to breast is—'*How your glove*

Burst and displayed the long thin lily-streak!'

What may have followed—that is forfeit now!

I hope the proud man has grown humble. True— 2010

One grace of humbleness absents itself—

Silence! yet love lies deeper than all words,

And not the spoken but the speechless love

Waits answer ere I rise and go my way."

THE INN ALBUM

Whereupon, yet one other time the name.

2015

To end she looks the large deliberate look,
Even prolongs it somewhat ; then the soul
Bursts forth in a clear laugh that lengthens on,
On, till—thinned, softened, silvered, one might say
The bitter runnel hides itself in sand,
Moistens the hard grey grimly comic speech.

2020

“ Ay—give the baffled angler even yet
His supreme triumph as he hales to shore
A second time the fish once 'scaped from hook :
So artfully has new bait hidden old
Blood-imbrued iron ! Ay, no barb 's beneath
The gilded minnow here ! You bid break trust,
This time, with who trusts me,—not simply bid
Me trust you, me who ruined but myself,
In trusting but myself ! Since, thanks to you,
I know the feel of sin and shame,—be sure,
I shall obey you and impose them both
On one who happens to be ignorant
Although my husband—for the lure is love,
Your love ! Try other tackle, fisher-friend !
Repentance, expiation, hopes and fears,
What you had been, may yet be, would I but
Prove helpmate to my hero—one and all
These silks and worsteds round the hook seduce
Hardly the late torn throat and mangled tongue.
Pack up, I pray, the whole assortment prompt !
Who wonders at variety of wile
In the Arch-cheat ? You are the Adversary !
Your fate is of your choosing : have your choice !
Wander the world,—God has some end to serve
Ere he suppress you ! He waits : I endure,
But interpose no finger-tip, forsooth,
To stop your passage to the pit. Enough

2025

2030

2035

2040

2045

THE INN ALBUM

That I am stable, uninvolved by you
In the rush downwards: free I gaze and fixed ; 2050
Your smiles, your tears, prayers, curses move alike
My crowned contempt. You kneel? Prostrate
yourself!
To earth, and would the whole world saw you
there !”

Whereupon—“ All right !” carelessly begins
Somebody from outside, who mounts the stair, 2055
And sends his voice for herald of approach :
Half in half out the doorway as the door
Gives way to push.

“ Old fellow, all ’s no good !
The train ’s your portion ! Lay the blame on me !
I ’m no diplomatist, and Bismarck’s self 2060
Had hardly braved the awful Aunt at broach
Of proposition—so has world-repute
Preceded the illustrious stranger ! Ah !—”

Quick the voice changes to astonishment,
Then horror, as the youth stops, sees, and knows. 2065

The man who knelt starts up from kneeling, stands
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare.

One great red outbreak buries—throat and brow—
The lady’s proud pale queenliness of scorn :
Then her great eyes that turned so quick, become 2070
Intenser : quail at gaze, not they indeed !

THE INN ALBUM

V

It is the young man shatters silence first.

“ Well, my lord—for indeed my lord you are,
I little guessed how rightly—this last proof
Of lordship-paramount confounds too much 2075
My simple head-piece ! Let 's see how we stand
Each to the other ! how we stood i' the game
Of life an hour ago,—the magpies, stile
And oak-tree witnessed. Truth exchanged for
truth—

My lord confessed his four-years-old affair— 2080
How he seduced and then forsook the girl
Who married somebody and left him sad.

My pitiful experience was—I loved
A girl whose gown's hem had I dared to touch
My finger would have failed me, palsy-fixed. 2085
She left me, sad enough, to marry—whom ?
A better man,—then possibly not you !

How does the game stand ? Who is who and what
Is what, o' the board now, since an hour went by ?
My lord's '*seduced, forsaken, sacrificed,*' 2090

Starts up, my lord's familiar instrument,
Associate and accomplice, mistress-slave—
Shares his adventure, follows on the sly !

—Ay, and since 'bag and baggage' is a phrase—
Baggage lay hid in carpet-bag belike, 2095
Was but unpadlocked when occasion came

For holding council, since my back was turned,
On how invent ten thousand pounds which, paid,
Would lure the winner to lose twenty more,
Beside refunding these ! Why else allow 2100

The fool to gain them ? So displays herself
The lady whom my heart believed—oh, laugh !

THE INN ALBUM

Noble and pure : whom my heart loved at once,
And who at once did speak truth when she said
'I am not mine now but another's'—thus 2105
Being that other's! Devil's-marriage, eh?
'My lie weds thine till lucre us do part?'
But pity me the snobbish simpleton,
You two aristocratic tip-top swells
At swindling! Quits, I cry! Decamp content 2110
With skin I'm peeled of: do not strip bones
bare—
As that you could, I have no doubt at all!
O you two rare ones! Male and female, Sir!
The male there smirked, this morning, *'Come, my
boy—
Out with it! You've been crossed in love, I think: 2115
I recognize the lover's hangdog look,
Make a clean breast and match my confidence,
For, I'll be frank, I too have had my fling,
Am punished for my fault, and smart enough!
Where now the victim hides her head, God knows!'* 2120
Here loomed her head life-large, the devil knew!
Look out, Salvini! Here's your man, your match!
He and I sat applauding, stall by stall,
Last Monday—*'Here's Othello'* was our word,
'But where's Iago?' Where? Why, there! And
now 2125
The fellow-artist, female specimen—
Oh, lady, you must needs describe yourself!
He's great in art, but you—how greater still
—(If I can rightly, out of all I learned,
Apply one bit of Latin that assures 2130
'Art means just art's concealment')—tower yourself!
For he stands plainly visible henceforth—
Liar and scamp : while you, in artistry
Prove so consummate—or I prove perhaps
So absolute an ass—that—either way— 2135

THE INN ALBUM

You still do seem to me who worshipped you
And see you take the homage of this man
Your master, who played slave and knelt, no doubt,
Before a mistress in his very craft . . .
Well, take the fact, I nor believe my eyes, 2140
Nor trust my understanding ! Still you seem
Noble and pure as when we had the talk
Under the tower, beneath the trees, that day.
And there 's the key explains the secret : down
He knelt to ask your leave to rise a grade 2145
I' the mystery of humbug : well he may !
For how you beat him ! Half an hour ago,
I held your master for my best of friends ;
And now I hate him ! Four years since, you
seemed
My heart's one love : well, and you so remain ! 2150
What 's he to you in craft ?”

She looks him through.

“ My friend, 't is' just that friendship have its
turn—
Interrogate thus me whom one, of foes
The worst, has questioned and is answered by.
Take you as frank an answer ! answers both 2155
Begin alike so far, divergent soon
World-wide—I own superiority
Over you, over him. As him I searched,
So do you stand seen through and through by me
Who, this time, proud, report your crystal shrines 2160
A dewdrop, plain as amber prisons round
A spider in the hollow heart his house !
Nowise are you that thing my fancy feared
When out you stepped on me, a minute since,
—This man's confederate ! no, you step not thus 2165
Obsequiously at beck and call to help

THE INN ALBUM

At need some second scheme, and supplement
Guile by force, use my shame to pinion me
From struggle and escape! I fancied that!
Forgive me! Only by strange chance,—most
strange

In even this strange world,—you enter now,
Obtain your knowledge. Me you havenot wronged
Who never wronged you—least of all, my friend,
That day beneath the College tower and trees,
When I refused to say,—‘*not friend but, love!*’

Had I been found as free as air when first
We met, I scarcely could have loved you. No—
For where was that in you which claimed return
Of love? My eyes were all too weak to probe
This other's seeming, but that seeming loved
The soul in me, and lied—I know too late!

While your truth was truth : and I knew at once
My power was just my beauty—bear the word—
As I must bear, of all my qualities,
To name the poorest one that serves my soul
And simulates myself! So much in me

You loved, I know: the something that's beneath
Heard not your call,—uncalled, no answer comes!
For, since in every love, or soon or late
Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,
Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day,

Take flight to find some other ; so it proved—
Missing me, you were ready for this man.
I apprehend the whole relation : his—
The soul wherein you saw your type of worth
At once, true object of your tribute. Well

Might I refuse such half-heart's homage ! Love
Divining, had assured you I no more
Stand his participant in infamy
Than you—I need no love to recognize
As simply dupe and nowise fellow-cheat !

THE INN ALBUM

Therefore accept one last friend's-word,—your
friend's,

All men's friend, save a felon's. Ravel out
The bad embroilment howsoe'er you may,
Distribute as it please you praise or blame 2205
To me—so you but fling this mockery far—
Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,
This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like !

Throw him his thousands back, and lay to heart
The lesson I was sent,—if man discerned 2210
Ever God's message,—just to teach. I judge—
To far another issue than could dream

Your cousin,—younger, fairer, as befits—
Who summoned me to judgment's exercise.
I find you, save in folly, innocent. 2215

And in my verdict lies your fate ; at choice
Of mine your cousin takes or leaves you. '*Take!*'
I bid her—for you tremble back to truth.

She turns the scale,—one touch of the pure hand
Shall so press down, emprison past relapse 2220
Farther vibration—'twixt veracity—

That 's honest solid earth—and falsehood, theft
And air, that 's one illusive emptiness !

That reptile capture you ? I conquered him :
You saw him cower before me. Have no fear 2225

He shall offend you farther ! Spare to spurn—
Safe let him slink hence till some subtler Eve
Than I, anticipate the snake—bruise head
Ere he bruise heel—or, warier than the first,
Some Adam purge earth's garden of its pest 2230
Before the slaver spoil the Tree of Life !

“ You ! Leave this youth, as he leaves you, as I
Leave each ! There 's caution surely extant yet
Though conscience in you were too vain a claim.
Hence quickly ! Keep the cash but leave unsoiled 2235

THE INN ALBUM

The heart I rescue and would lay to heal
Beside another's ! Never let her know
How near came taint of your companionship !"

"Ah"—draws a long breath with a newstrangelook
The man she interpellates—soul a-stir 2240
Under its covert, as, beneath the dust,
A coppery sparkle all at once denotes
The hid snake has conceived a purpose.

"Ah—
Innocence should be crowned with ignorance ?
Desirable indeed, but difficult ! 2245
As if yourself, now, had not glorified
Your helpmate by imparting him a hint
Of how a monster made the victim bleed
Ere crook and courage saved her—hint, I say,—
Not the whole horror,—that were needless risk,— 2250
But just such inkling, fancy of the fact,
As should suffice to qualify henceforth
The shepherd, when another lamb would stray,
For warning '*Ware the wolf!*' No doubt at all,
Silence is generosity,—keeps wolf 2255
Unhunted by flock's warder ! Excellent,
Did—generous to me, mean—just to him !
But, screening the deceiver, lamb were found
Outraging the deceitless ! So,—he knows !
And yet, unharmed I breathe—perchance, repent— 2260
Thanks to the mercifully-politic !"

"Ignorance is not innocence but sin—
Witness yourself ignore what after-pangs
Pursue the plague-infected. Merciful
Am I ? Perhaps ! The more contempt, the less 2265
Hatred ; and who so worthy of contempt
As you that rest assured I cooled the spot

THE INN ALBUM

I could not cure, by poisoning, forsooth,
Whose hand I pressed there ? Understand for once
That, sick, of all the pains corroding me 2270
This burnt the last and nowise least—the need
Of simulating soundness. I resolved—
No matter how the struggle tasked weak flesh—
To hide the truth away as in a grave
From—most of all—my husband : he nor knows 2275
Nor ever shall be made to know your part,
My part, the devil's part,—I trust, God's part
In the foul matter. Saved, I yearn to save
And not destroy : and what destruction like
The abolishing of faith in him, that 's faith 2280
In me as pure and true ? Acquaint some child
Who takes yon tree into his confidence,
That, where he sleeps now, was a murder done,
And that the grass which grows so thick, he thinks,
Only to pillow him is product just 2285
Of what lies festering beneath ! 'T is God
Must bear such secrets and disclose them. Man ?
The miserable thing I have become
By dread acquaintance with my secret—*you*—
That thing had he become by learning *me*— 2290
The miserable, whom his ignorance
Would wrongly call the wicked : ignorance
Being, I hold, sin ever, small or great.
No, he knows nothing !”

“ He and I alike
Are bound to you for such discreteness, then. 2295
What if our talk should terminate awhile ?
Here is a gentleman to satisfy,
Settle accounts with, pay ten thousand pounds
Before we part—as, by his face, I fear,
Results from your appearance on the scene. 2300
Grant me a minute's parley with my friend

THE INN ALBUM

Which scarce admits of a third personage !
The room from which you made your entry first
So opportunely—still untenanted—
What if you please return there ? Just a word 2305
To my young friend first—then, a word to you,
And you depart to fan away each fly
From who, grass-pillowed, sleeps so sound at
home ! ”

“ So the old truth comes back ! A wholesome
change,—
At last the altered eye, the rightful tone ! 2310
But even to the truth that drops disguise
And stands forth grinning malice which but now
Whined so contritely—I refuse assent
Just as to malice. I, once gone, come back ?
No, my lord ! I enjoy the privilege 2315
Of being absolutely loosed from you
Too much—the knowledge that your power is null
Which was omnipotence. A word of mouth,
A wink of eye would have detained me once,
Body and soul your slave ; and now, thank God, 2320
Your fawningest of prayers, your frightfulest
Of curses—neither would avail to turn
My footstep for a moment ! ”

“ Prayer, then, tries
No such adventure. Let us cast about
For something novel in expedient : take 2325
Command,—what say you ? I profess myself
One fertile in resource. Commanding, then,
I bid—not only wait there, but return
Here, where I want you ! Disobey and—good !
On your own head the peril ! ”

“ Come ! ” breaks in 2330
The boy with his good glowing face. “ Shut up !

THE INN ALBUM

None of this sort of thing while I stand here
—Not to stand that ! No bullying, I beg !
I also am to leave you presently
And never more set eyes upon your face— 2335
You won't mind that much ; but—I tell you frank—
I do mind having to remember this
For your last word and deed—my friend who were !
Bully a woman you have ruined, eh ?
Do you know,—I give credit all at once 2340
To all those stories everybody told
And nobody but I would disbelieve :
They all seem likely now,—nay, certain, sure !
I dare say you did cheat at cards that night
The row was at the Club : '*sauter la coupe*'— 2345
That was your 'cut,' for which your friends 'cut' you ;
While I, the booby, 'cut'—acquaintanceship
With who so much as laughed when I said '*luck!*'
I dare say you had bets against the horse
They doctored at the Derby ; little doubt, 2350
That fellow with the sister found you shirk
His challenge and did kick you like a ball,
Just as the story went about ! Enough :
It only serves to show how well advised,
Madam, you were in bidding such a fool 2355
As I, go hang. You see how the mere sight
And sound of you suffice to tumble down
Conviction topsy-turvy : no,—that 's false,—
There 's no unknowing what one knows ; and yet
Such is my folly that, in gratitude 2360
For . . . well, I 'm stupid ; but you seemed to wish
I should know gently what I know, should slip
Softly from old to new, not break my neck
Between beliefs of what you were and are.
Well then, for just the sake of such a wish 2365
To cut no worse a figure than needs must
In even eyes like mine, I 'd sacrifice

THE INN ALBUM

Body and soul! But don't think danger—pray!—
Menaces either! He do harm to us?
Let me say 'us' this one time! You'd allow 2370
I lent perhaps my hand to rid your ear
Of some cur's yelping—hand that's fortified,
Into the bargain, with a horsewhip? Oh,
One crack and you shall see how curs decamp!
My lord, you know your losses and my gains. 2375
Pay me my money at the proper time!
If cash be not forthcoming,—well, yourself
Have taught me, and tried often, I'll engage,
The proper course: I post you at the Club,
Pillory the defaulter. Crack, to-day, 2380
Shall, slash, to-morrow, slice through flesh and bone!
There, Madam, you need mind no cur, I think!"

"Ah, what a gain to have an apt no less
Than grateful scholar! Nay, he brings to mind
My knowledge till he puts me to the blush, 2385
So long has it lain rusty! Post my name!
That were indeed a wheal from whipcord! Whew!
I wonder now if I could rummage out
—Just to match weapons—some old scorpion-
scourge!
Madam, you hear my pupil, may applaud 2390
His triumph o'er the master. I—no more
Bully, since I'm forbidden: but entreat—
Wait and return—for my sake, no! but just
To save your own defender, should he chance
Get thwacked thro' awkward flourish of his thong. 2395
And what if—since all waiting's weary work—
I help the time pass 'twixt your exit now
And entry then? for—pastime proper—here's
The very thing, the Album, verse and prose
To make the laughing minutes launch away! 2400
Each of us must contribute. I'll begin—

THE INN ALBUM

'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot !*'
I 'm confident I beat the bard,—for why ?
My young friend owns me an Iago—him
Confessed, among the other qualities, 2405
A ready rhymers. Oh, he rhymed ! Here goes !
—Something to end with '*horsewhip !*' No, that
rhyme
Beats me ; there's '*cowslip*,' '*boltsprit*,' nothing else !
So, Tennyson take my benison,—verse for bard,
Prose suits the gambler's book best ! Dared and
done !" 2410

Wherewith he dips pen, writes a line or two,
Closes and clasps the cover, gives the book,
Bowing the while, to her who hesitates,
Turns half away, turns round again, at last
Takes it as you touch carrion, then retires. 2415
The door shuts fast the couple.

VI

With a change
Of his whole manner, opens out at once
The Adversary.

"Now, my friend, for you !
You who, protected late, aggressive grown,
Brandish, it seems, a weapon I must 'ware ! 2420
Plain speech in me becomes respectable
Henceforth, because courageous ; plainly, then—
(Have lash well loose, hold handle tight and light !)
Throughout my life's experience, you indulged
Yourself and friend by passing in review 2425
So courteously but now, I vainly search
To find one record of a specimen
So perfect of the pure and simple fool
As this you furnish me. Ingratitude

THE INN ALBUM

I lump with folly,—all 's one lot,—so—fool ! 2430
 Did I seek you or you seek me ? Seek ? sneak
 For service to, and service you would style—
 And did style—godlike, scarce an hour ago !
 Fool, there again, yet not precisely there
 First-rate in folly : since the hand you kissed 2435
 Did pick you from the kennel, did plant firm
 Your footstep on the pathway, did persuade
 Your awkward shamble to true gait and pace,
 Fit for the world you walk in. Once a-strut
 On that firm pavement which your cowardice 2440
 Was for renouncing as a pitfall, next
 Came need to clear your brains of their conceit
 They cleverly could distinguish who was who,
 Whatever folk might tramp the thoroughfare.
 Men, now—familiarily you read them off, 2445
 Each phyz at first sight ! O you had an eye !
 Who couched it ? made you disappoint each fox
 Eager to strip my gosling of his fluff
 So golden as he cackled ' Goose trusts lamb ? '
 ' *Ay, but I saved you—wolf defeated fox—* 2450
Wanting to pick your bones myself ! ' then, wolf
 Has got the worst of it with goose for once.
 I, penniless, pay you ten thousand pounds
 (—No gesture, pray ! I pay ere I depart.)
 And how you turn advantage to account 2455
 Here 's the example. Have I proved so wrong
 In my peremptory '*debt must be discharged ?*'
 O you laughed lovelily, were loth to leave
 The old friend out at elbows—pooh, a thing
 Not to be thought of ! I must keep my cash, 2460
 And you forget your generosity !
 Ha ha, I took your measure when I laughed
 My laugh to that ! First quarrel—nay, first faint
 Pretence at taking umbrage—'*Down with debt,*
Both interest and principal !—The Club, 2465

THE INN ALBUM

Exposure and expulsion!—stamp me out!
 That 's the magnanimous magnificent
 Renunciation of advantage! Well,
 But whence and why did you take umbrage, Sir?
 Because your master, having made you know 2470
 Somewhat of men, was minded to advance,
 Expound you women, still a mystery!
 My pupil potted with a cloud on brow,
 A clod in breast: had loved, and vainly loved:
 Whence blight and blackness, just for all the world 2475
 As Byron used to teach us boys. Thought I—
'Quick rid him of that rubbish! Clear the cloud,
And set the heart a-pulsing!'—heart, this time:
 'T was nothing but the head I doctored late
 For ignorance of Man; now heart 's to dose, 2480
 Palsied by over-palpitation due
 To Woman-worship—so, to work at once
 On first avowal of the patient's ache!
 This morning you described your malady,—
 How you dared love a piece of virtue—lost 2485
 To reason, as the upshot showed: for scorn
 Fitly repaid your stupid arrogance;
 And, parting, you went two ways, she resumed
 Her path—perfection, while forlorn you paced
 The world that 's made for beasts like you and me. 2490
 My remedy was—tell the fool the truth!
 Your paragon of purity had plumped
 Into these arms at their first outspread—*'fallen*
My victim,' she prefers to turn the phrase—
 And, in exchange for that frank confidence, 2495
 Asked for my whole life present and to come—
 Marriage: a thing uncovenanted for,
 Never so much as put in question. Life—
 Implied by marriage—throw that trifle in
 And round the bargain off, no otherwise 2500
 Than if, when we played cards, because you won

THE INN ALBUM

My money you should also want my head !
 That, I demurred to : 'we but played '*for love*'—
 She won my love ; had she proposed for stakes
 '*Marriage*,'—why, that 's for whist, a wiser game. 2505
 Whereat she raved at me, as losers will,
 And went her way. So far the story 's known,
 The remedy 's applied, no farther : which
 Here 's the sick man's first *honorarium* for—
 Posting his medicine-monger at the Club ! 2510
 That being, Sir, the whole you mean my fee—
 In gratitude for such munificence
 I 'm bound in common honesty to spare
 No droplet of the draught : so,—pinch your nose,
 Pull no wry faces !—drain it to the dregs ! 2515
 I say '*She went off*'—'*went off*,' you subjoin,
 '*Since not to wedded bliss, as I supposed,*
Sure to some convent : solitude and peace
Help her to hide the shame from mortal view,
With prayer and fasting.' No, my sapient Sir ! 2520
 Far wiselier, straightway she betook herself
 To a prize-portent from the donkey-show
 Of leathern long-ears that compete for palm
 In clerical absurdity : since he,
 Good ass, nor practises the shaving-trick, 2525
 The candle-crotchet, nonsense which repays
 When you 've young ladies congregant, — but
 schools
 The poor,—toils, moils and grinds the mill nor
 means
 To stop and munch one thistle in this life
 Till next life smother him with roses : just 2530
 The parson for her purpose ! Him she stroked
 Over the muzzle ; into mouth with bit,
 And on to back with saddle,—there he stood,
 The serviceable beast who heard, believed
 And meekly bowed him to the burden,—borne 2535

THE INN ALBUM

Off in a canter to seclusion—ay,
 The lady's lost! But had a friend of mine
 —While friend he was—imparted his sad case
 To sympathizing counsellor, full soon
 One cloud at least had vanished from his brow. 2540
 'Don't fear!' had followed reassuringly—
 'The lost will in due time turn up again,
 Probably just when, weary of the world,
 You think of nothing less than settling-down
 To country life and golden days, beside 2545
 A dearest best and brightest virtuousest
 Wife: who needs no more hope to hold her own
 Against the naughty-and-repentant—no,
 Than water-gruel against Roman punch!'

And as I prophesied, it proves! My youth,— 2550
 Just at the happy moment when, subdued
 To spooniness, he finds that youth fleets fast,
 Thattown-lifetires, that menshould drop boys'-play,
 That property, position have, no doubt,
 Their exigency with their privilege, 2555
 And if the wealthy wed with wealth, how dire
 The double duty!—in, behold, there beams
 Our long-lost lady, form and face complete!
 And where's my moralizing pupil now,
 Had not his master missed a train by chance? 2560
 But, by your side instead of whirled away,
 How have I spoiled scene, stopped catastrophe,
 Struck flat the stage-effect I know by heart!
 Sudden and strange the meeting—improvised?
 Bless you, the last event she hoped or dreamed! 2565
 But rude sharp stroke will crush out fire from flint—
 Assuredly from flesh. 'T is you?' 'Myself.'
 'Changed?' 'Changeless.' 'Then, what's earth to
 me?' 'To me
 What's heaven?' 'So,—thine!' 'And thine!' 'And
 likewise mine!'

THE INN ALBUM

Had laughed '*Amen*' the devil, but for me 2570
 Whose intermeddling hinders this hot haste,
 And bids you, ere concluding contract, pause—
 Ponder one lesson more, then sign and seal
 At leisure and at pleasure,—lesson's price
 Being, if you have skill to estimate, 2575
 —How say you?—I'm discharged my debt in full!
 Since paid you stand, to farthing uttermost,
 Unless I fare like that black majesty
 A friend of mine had visit from last Spring.
 Coasting along the Cape-side, he 's becalmed 2580
 Off an uncharted bay, a novel town
 Untouched at by the trader : here 's a chance !
 Out paddles straight the king in his canoe,
 Comes over bulwark, says he means to buy
 Ship's cargo—being rich and having brought 2585
 A treasure ample for the purpose. See !
 Four dragons, stalwart blackies, guard the same
 Wrapped round and round: its hulls, a multitude,—
 Palm-leaf and cocoa-mat and goat's-hair cloth
 All duly braced about with bark and board,— 2590
 Suggest how brave, 'neath coat, must kernel be !
 At length the peeling is accomplished, plain
 The casket opens out its core, and lo
 —A brand-new British silver sixpence—bid
 That 's ample for the Bank,—thinks majesty ! 2595
 You are the Captain ; call my sixpence cracked
 Or copper ; '*what I've said is calumny ;*
The lady's spotless !' Then, I'll prove my words,
 Or make you prove them true as truth—yourself,
 Here, on the instant ! I'll not mince my speech, 2600
 Things at this issue. When she enters, then,
 Make love to her ! No talk of marriage now—
 The point-blank bare proposal ! Pick no phrase—
 Prevent all misconception ! Soon you 'll see
 How different the tactics when she deals 2605

THE INN ALBUM

With an instructed man, no longer boy
Who blushes like a booby. Woman's wit !
Man, since you have instruction, blush no more !
Such your five minutes' profit by my pains,
'T is simply now—demand and be possessed ! 2610
Which means—you may possess—may strip the tree
Of fruit desirable to make one wise.
More I nor wish nor want : your act 's your act,
My teaching is but—there 's the fruit to pluck
Or let alone at pleasure. Next advance 2615
In knowledge were beyond you ! Don't expect
I bid a novice—pluck, suck, send sky-high
Such fruit, once taught that neither crab nor sloe
Falls readier prey to who but robs a hedge,
Than this gold apple to my Hercules. 2620
Were you no novice but proficient—then,
Then, truly, I might prompt you—Touch and taste,
Try flavour and be tired as soon as I !
Toss on the prize to greedy mouths agape,
Betake yours, sobered as the satiate grow, 2625
To wise man's solid meal of house and land,
Consoles and cousin ! but my boy, my boy,
Such lore 's above you !

Here 's the lady back !
So, Madam, you have conned the Album-page
And come to thank its last contributor ? 2630
How kind and condescending ! I retire
A moment, lest I spoil the interview,
And mar my own endeavour to make friends—
You with him, him with you, and both with me !
If I succeed—permit me to inquire 2635
Five minutes hence ! Friends bid good-bye, you
know.'
And out he goes.

THE INN ALBUM

VII

She, face, form, bearing, one
Superb composure—

“ He has told you all ?

Yes, he has told you all, your silence says—
What gives him, as he thinks the mastery 2640
Over my body and my soul !—has told
That instance, even, of their servitude
He now exacts of me ? A silent blush !
That 's well, though better would white ignorance
Beseem your brow, undesecrate before— 2645
Ay, when I left you ! I too learn at last
—Hideously learned as I seemed so late—
What sin may swell to. Yes,—I needed learn
That, when my prophet's rod became the snake
I fled from, it would, one day, swallow up 2650
—Incorporate whatever serpentine
Falsehood and treason and unmanliness
Beslime earth's pavement: such the power of Hell,
And so beginning, ends no otherwise
The Adversary ! I was ignorant, 2655
Blameworthy—if you will ; but blame I take
Nowise upon me as I ask myself
—*You*—how can you, whose soul I seemed to read
The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep
Even with him for consort ? I revolve 2660
Much memory, pry into the looks and words
Of that day's walk beneath the College wall,
And nowhere can distinguish, in what gleams
Only pure marble through my dusky past,
A dubious cranny where such poison-seed 2665
Might harbour, nourish what should yield to-day
This dread ingredient for the cup I drink.

THE INN ALBUM

Do not I recognize and honour truth
In seeming?—take your truth and for return,
Give you my truth, a no less precious gift? 2670
You loved me: I believed you. I replied
—How could I other? ‘*I was not my own,*’
—No longer had the eyes to see, the ears
To hear, the mind to judge, since heart and soul
Now were another’s. My own right in me, 2675
For well or ill, consigned away—my face
Fronted the honest path, deflection whence
Had shamed me in the furtive backward look
At the late bargain—fit such chapman’s phrase!—
As though—less hasty and more provident— 2680
Waiting had brought advantage. Not for me
The chapman’s chance! Yet while thus much was
true,
I spared you—as I knew you then—one more
Concluding word which, truth no less, seemed best
Buried away for ever. Take it now 2685
Its power to pain is past! Four years—that day—
Those limes that make the College avenue!
I would that—friend and foe—by miracle,
I had, that moment, seen into the heart
Of either, as I now am taught to see! 2690
I do believe I should have straight assumed
My proper function, and sustained a soul,
Nor aimed at being just sustained myself
By some man’s soul—the weaker woman’s-want!
So had I missed the momentary thrill 2695
Of finding me in presence of a god,
But gained the god’s own feeling when he gives
Such thrill to what turns life from death before.
‘*Gods many and Lords many,*’ says the Book:
You would have yielded up your soul to me 2700
—Not to the false god who has burned its clay
In his own image. I had shed my love

THE INN ALBUM

Like Spring dew on the clod all flowery thence,
Not sent up a wild vapour to the sun
That drinks and then disperses. Both of us 2705
Blameworthy,—I first meet my punishment—
And not so hard to bear. I breathe again!
Forth from those arms' entwining leprosy
At last I struggle—uncontaminate :
Why must I leave *you* pressing to the breast 2710
That's all one plague-spot? Did you love me once?
Then take love's last and best return! I think,
Womanliness means only motherhood ;
All love begins and ends there,—roams enough,
But, having run the circle, rests at home. 2715
Why is your expiation yet to make?
Pull shame with your own hands from your own
head
Now,—never wait the slow envelopment
Submitted to by unelastic age!
One fierce throe frees the sapling: flake on flake 2720
Lull till they leave the oak snow-stupefied.
Your heart retains its vital warmth—or why
That blushing reassurance? Blush, young blood!
Break from beneath this icy premature
Captivity of wickedness—I warn 2725
Back, in God's name! No fresh encroachment
here!
This May breaks all to bud—no Winter now!
Friend, we are both forgiven! Sin no more!
I am past sin now, so shall you become!
Meanwhile I testify that, lying once, 2730
My foe lied ever, most lied last of all.
He, waking, whispered to your sense asleep
The wicked counsel,—and assent might seem ;
But, roused, your healthy indignation breaks
The idle dream-pact. You would die—not dare 2735
Confirm your dream-resolve,—nay, find the word

THE INN ALBUM

That fits the deed to bear the light of day !
Say I have justly judged you ! then farewell
To blushing—nay, it ends in smiles, not tears !
Why tears now ? I have justly judged, thank
God ! ”

2740

He does blush boy-like, but the man speaks out,
—Makes the due effort to surmount himself.

“ I don't know what he wrote—how should I ? Nor
How he could read my purpose which, it seems,
He chose to somehow write—mistakenly 2745
Or else for mischief's sake. I scarce believe
My purpose put before you fair and plain
Would need annoy so much ; but there 's my luck—
From first to last I blunder. Still, one more
Turn at the target, try to speak my thought ! 2750
Since he could guess my purpose, won't you read
Right what he set down wrong ? He said—let 's
think !

Ay, so !—he did begin by telling heaps
Of tales about you. Now, you see—suppose
Anyone told me—my own mother died 2755
Before I knew her—told me—to his cost !—
Such tales about my own dead mother : why,
You would not wonder surely if I knew,
By nothing but my own heart's help, he lied,
Would you ? No reason 's wanted in the case. 2760
So with you ! In they burnt on me, his tales,
Much as when madhouse-inmates crowd around,
Make captive any visitor and scream
All sorts of stories of their keeper—he 's
Both dwarf and giant, vulture, wolf, dog, cat, 2765
Serpent and scorpion, yet man all the same ;
Sane people soon see through the gibberish !
I just made out, you somehow lived somewhere
A life of shame—I can't distinguish more—

THE INN ALBUM

Married or single—how, don't matter much : 2770
Shame which himself had caused—that point was
clear,
That fact confessed—that thing to hold and keep.
Oh, and he added some absurdity
—That you were here to make me—ha, ha, ha !—
Still love you, still of mind to die for you, 2775
Ha, ha—as if that needed mighty pains !
Now, foolish as . . . but never mind myself
—What I am, what I am not, in the eye
Of the world, is what I never cared for much.
Fool then or no fool, not one single word 2780
In the whole string of lies did I believe,
But this—this only—if I choke, who cares ?—
I believe somehow in your purity
Perfect as ever ! Else what use is God ?
He is God, and work miracles He can ! 2785
Then, what shall I do ? Quite as clear, my course !
They 've got a thing they call their Labyrinth
I' the garden yonder : and my cousin played
A pretty trick once, led and lost me deep
Inside the briery maze of hedge round hedge ; 2790
And there might I be staying now, stock-still,
But that I laughing bade eyes follow nose
And so straight pushed my path through let and
stop
And soon was out in the open, face all scratched,
But well behind my back the prison-bars 2795
In sorry plight enough, I promise you !
So here : I won my way to truth through lies—
Said, as I saw light,—if her shame be shame
I'll rescue and redeem her,—shame 's no shame ?
Then, I'll avenge, protect—redeem myself 2800
The stupidest of sinners ! Here I stand !
Dear,—let me once dare call you so,—you said
Thus ought you to have done, four years ago,

THE INN ALBUM

Such things and such! Ay, dear, and what
ought I?

You were revealed to me : where 's gratitude, 2805
Where 's memory even, where the gain of you
Discernible in my low after-life
Of fancied consolation? why, no horse
Once fed on corn, will, missing corn, go munch
Mere thistles like a donkey! I missed you, 2810
And in your place found—him, made him my love,
Ay, did I,—by this token, that he taught
So much beast-nature that I meant . . . God
knows

Whether I bow me to the dust enough! . . .
To marry—yes, my cousin here! I hope 2815
That was a master-stroke! Take heart of hers,
And give her hand of mine with no more heart
Than now you see upon this brow I strike!
What atom of a heart do I retain
Not all yours? Dear, you know it! Easily 2820
May she accord me pardon when I place
My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,
Since uttermost indignity is spared—
Mere marriage and no love! And all this time
Not one word to the purpose! Are you free? 2825
Only wait! only let me serve—deserve
Where you appoint and how you see the good!
I have the will—perhaps the power—at least
Means that have power against the world. For
time—

Take my whole life for your experiment! 2830
If you are bound—in marriage, say—why, still,
Still, sure, there 's something for a friend to do,
Outside? A mere well-wisher, understand!
I 'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,
Swing it wide open to let you and him 2835
Pass freely,—and you need not look, much less

THE INN ALBUM

Fling me a '*Thank you—are you there, old friend?*'
Don't say that even : I should drop like shot !
So I feel now at least : some day, who knows ?
After no end of weeks and months and years 2840
You might smile '*I believe you did your best !*'
And that shall make my heart leap—leap such leap
As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there !
Ah, there 's just one thing more ! How pale you
look !

Why ? Are you angry ? If there 's, after all, 2845
Worst come to worst—if still there somehow be
The shame—I said was no shame,—none, I
swear !—

In that case, if my hand and what it holds,—
My name,—might be your safeguard now—at
once—

Why, here 's the hand—you have the heart ! Of
course— 2850

No cheat, no binding you, because I 'm bound,
To let me off probation by one day,
Week, month, year, lifetime ! Prove as you
propose !

Here 's the hand with the name to take or leave !
That 's all—and no great piece of news, I hope !” 2855

“Give me the hand, then !” she cries hastily.

“Quick, now ! I hear his footstep !”

Hand in hand
The couple face him as he enters, stops
Short, stands surprised a moment, laughs away
Surprise, resumes the much-experienced man. 2860

“So, you accept him ?”

“Till us death do part !”

THE INN ALBUM

“No longer? Come, that’s right and rational!
I fancied there was power in common sense,
But did not know it worked thus promptly. Well—
At last each understands the other, then? 2865
Each drops disguise, then? So, at supper-time
These masquerading people doff their gear,
Grand Turk his pompous turban, Quakeress
Her stiff-starched bib and tucker,—make-believe
That only bothers when, ball-business done, 2870
Nature demands champagne and *mayonnaise*.
Just so has each of us sage three abjured
His and her moral pet particular
Pretension to superiority,
And, cheek by jowl, we henceforth munch and
joke! 2875
Go, happy pair, paternally dismissed
To live and die together—for a month,
Discretion can award no more! Depart
From whatsoe’er the calm sweet solitude
Selected—Paris not improbably— 2880
At month’s end, when the honeycomb’s left wax,
—You, daughter, with a pocketful of gold
Enough to find your village boys and girls
In duffel cloaks and hobnailed shoes from May
To—what’s the phrase?—Christmas-come-never-
mas! 2885
You, son and heir of mine, shall re-appear
Ere Spring-time, that’s the ring-time, lose one
leaf,
And—not without regretful smack of lip
The while you wipe it free of honey-smear—
Marry the cousin, play the magistrate, 2890
Stand for the county, prove perfection’s pink—
Master of hounds, gay-coated dine—nor die
Sooner than needs of gout, obesity,
And sons at Christ Church! As for me,—ah me,

THE INN ALBUM

I abdicate—retire on my success, 2895
 Four years well occupied in teaching youth
 —My son and daughter the exemplary!
 Time for me to retire now, having placed
 Proud on their pedestal the pair : in turn,
 Let them do homage to their master ! You,— 2900
 Well, your flushed cheek and flashing eye proclaim
 Sufficiently your gratitude : you paid
 The *honorarium*, the ten thousand pounds
 To purpose, did you not ? I told you so !
 And you, but, bless me, why so pale—so faint 2905
 At influx of good fortune ? Certainly,
 No matter how or why or whose the fault,
 I save your life—save it, nor less nor more !
 You blindly were resolved to welcome death
 In that black boor-and-bumpkin-haunted hole 2910
 Of his, the prig with all the preachments ! You
 Installed as nurse and matron to the crones
 And wenches, while there lay a world outside
 Like Paris (which again I recommend)
 In company and guidance of—first, this, 2915
 Then—all in good time—some new friend as fit—
 What if I were to say, some fresh myself,
 As I once figured ? Each dog has his day,
 And mine 's at sunset : what should old dog do
 But eye young litters' frisky puppyhood ? 2920
 Oh I shall watch this beauty and this youth
 Frisk it in brilliance ! But don't fear ! Discreet,
 I shall pretend to no more recognize
 My quondam pupils than the doctor nods
 When certain old acquaintances may cross 2925
 His path in Park, or sit down prim beside
 His plate at dinner-table : tip nor wink
 Scares patients he has put, for reason good,
 Under restriction,—maybe, talked sometimes
 Of douche or horsewhip to,—for why ? because 2930

THE INN ALBUM

The gentleman would crazily declare
His best friend was—Iago! Ay, and worse—
The lady, all at once grown lunatic,
In suicidal monomania vowed,
To save her soul, she needs must starve herself! 2935
They 're cured now, both, and I tell nobody.
Why don't you speak? Nay, speechless, each of you
Can spare,—without unclasping plighted troth,—
At least one hand to shake! Left-hands will do—
Yours first, my daughter! Ah, it guards—it gripes 2940
The precious Album fast—and prudently!
As well obliterate the record there
On page the last: allow me tear the leaf!
Pray, now! And afterward, to make amends,
What if all three of us contribute each 2945
A line to that prelusive fragment,—help
The embarrassed bard who broke out to break down
Dumbfounded at such unforeseen success?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot*'
You begin—*place aux dames!* I'll prompt you then! 2950
'*Here do I take the good the gods allot!*'
Next you, Sir! What, still sulky? Sing, O Muse!
'*Here does my lord in full discharge his shot!*'
Now for the crowning flourish! mine shall be . . ."
"Nothing to match your first effusion, mar 2955
What was, is, shall remain your masterpiece!
Authorship has the alteration-itch!
No, I protest against erasure. Read,
My friend!" (she gasps out). "Read and quickly
read
'*Before us death do part,*' what made you mine 2960
And made me yours—the marriage-licence here!
Decide if he is like to mend the same!"

And so the lady, white to ghastliness,
Manages somehow to display the page

THE INN ALBUM

With left-hand only, while the right retains 2965
The other hand, the young man's,—dreaming-
drunk

He, with this drench of stupefying stuff,
Eyes wide, mouth open,—half the idiot's stare
And half the prophet's insight,—holding tight,
All the same, by his one fact in the world— 2970
The lady's right-hand : he but seems to read—
Does not, for certain ; yet, how understand
Unless he reads ?

So, understand he does,
For certain. Slowly, word by word, *she* reads
Aloud that licence—or that warrant, say. 2975

*“ One against two—and two that urge their odds
To uttermost—I needs must try resource !
Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn
Body and soul : you spurned and safely spurned
So you had spared me the superfluous taunt 2980
“ Prostration means no power to stand erect,
Stand, trampling on who trampled—prostrate now ! ”
So, with my other fool-foe : I was fain
Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,
And him the infection gains, he too must needs 2985
Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so !
Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence.
He loves you ; he demands your love : both know
What love means in my language. Love him then !
Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt : 2990
Therefore, deliver me from him, thereby
Likewise delivering from me yourself !
For, hesitate—much more, refuse consent—
I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat
Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase ! 2995
Consent—you stop my mouth, the only way.”*

THE INN ALBUM

“I did well, trusting instinct : knew your hand
Had never joined with his in fellowship
Over this pact of infamy. You known—
As he was known through every nerve of me. 3000
Therefore I ‘*stopped his mouth the only way*’
But *my* way ! none was left for you, my friend—
The loyal—near, the loved one ! No—no—no !
Threaten ? Chastise ? The coward would but quail.
Conquer who can, the cunning of the snake ! 3005
Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head,
And still you leave vibration of the tongue.
His malice had redoubled—not on me
Who, myself, choose my own refining fire—
But on poor unsuspecting innocence ; 3010
And,—victim,—to turn executioner
Also—that feat effected, forked tongue
Had done indeed its office ! Once snake’s ‘*mouth*’
Thus ‘*open*’—how could mortal ‘*stop it*’ ?”

“So !”

A tiger-flash—yell, spring, and scream : halloo ! 3015
Death’s out and on him, has and holds him—ugh !
But *ne trucidet coram populo*
Juvenis senem ! Right the Horatian rule !

There, see how soon a quiet comes to pass !

VIII

The youth is somehow by the lady’s side. 3020
His right-hand grasps her right-hand once again.
Both gaze on the dead body. Hers the word.

“And that was good but useless. Had I lived
The danger was to dread : but, dying now—

THE INN ALBUM

Himself would hardly, become talkative, 3025
Since talk no more means torture. Fools—what
fools

These wicked men are ! Had I borne four years,
Four years of weeks and months and days and
nights,

Inured me to the consciousness of life
Coiled round by his life, with the tongue to ply,— 3030
But that I bore about me, for prompt use

At urgent need, the thing that '*stops the mouth*'
And stays the venom ? Since such need was now
Or never,—how should use not follow need ?

Bear witness for me, I withdraw from life 3035
By virtue of the licence—warrant, say,

That blackens yet this Album—white again,
Thanks still to my one friend who tears the page !

Now, let me write the line of supplement,
As counselled by my foe there : '*each a line !*' " 3040

And she does falteringly write to end.

*" I die now through the villain who lies dead,
Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,
So, my defender slew him. God protect
The right ! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now. 3045
Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent
In blessing my defender from my soul ! "*

And so ends the Inn Album.

As she dies,
Begins outside a voice that sounds like song,
And is indeed half song though meant for speech 3050
Muttered in time to motion—stir of heart
That unsubduably must bubble forth
To match the fawn-step as it mounts the stair.

THE INN ALBUM

"All 's ended and all 's over ! Verdict found
 ' *Not guilty* '—prisoner forthwith set free, 3055
 Mid cheers the Court pretends to disregard !
 Now Portia, now for Daniel, late severe,
 At last appeased, benignant ! ' *This young man—*
Hem—has the young man's foibles but no fault.
He 's virgin soil—a friend must cultivate. 3060
I think no plant called 'love' grows wild—a friend
May introduce, and name the bloom, the fruit !'
 Here somebody dares wave a handkerchief—
 She 'll want to hide her face with presently !
 Good-bye then ! ' *Cigno fedel, cigno fedel,* 3065
Addio ! Now, was ever such mistake—
 Ever such foolish ugly omen ? Pshaw !
 Wagner, beside ! ' *Amo te solo, te*
Solo amai ! ' That 's worth fifty such !
 But, mum, the grave face at the opened door !" 3070

And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks
 Diamond and damask,—cheeks so white erewhile
 Because of a vague fancy, idle fear
 Chased on reflection !—pausing, taps discreet ;
 And then, to give herself a countenance, 3075
 Before she comes upon the pair inside,
 Loud—the oft-quoted, long-laughed-over line—
 " ' *Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot !* '
 Open the door ! "

No : let the curtain fall !

THE
AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS

MAY I be permitted to chat a little, by way of recreation, at the end of a somewhat toilsome and perhaps fruitless adventure?

If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so by the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language. The use of certain allowable constructions which, happening to be out of daily favour, are all the more appropriate to archaic workmanship, is no violence: but I would be tolerant for once,—in the case of so immensely famous an original,—of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear: while, with respect to amplifications and embellishments,—anything rather than, with the good farmer, experience that most signal of mortifications, “to gape for Æschylus and get Theognis.” I should especially decline,—what may appear to brighten up a passage,—the employment of a new word for some old one—*πόνος*, or *μέγας*, or *τέλος*, with its congeners, recurring four times in three lines: for though such substitution may be in itself perfectly justifiable, yet this exercise of ingenuity ought to be within the competence of the unaided English reader if he likes to show himself ingenious. Learning Greek teaches Greek, and nothing else: certainly not common sense, if that have failed to precede the teaching. Further,—

AGAMEMNON

if I obtained a mere strict bald version of thing by thing, or at least word pregnant with thing, I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed magniloquence and sonority of the Greek; and this with the less regret, inasmuch as there is abundant musicality elsewhere, but nowhere else than in his poem the ideas of the poet. And lastly, when presented with these ideas, I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to resemble Æschylus, *ξυμβαλεῖν οὐ ῥάδιος*, "not easy to understand," in the opinion of his stoutest advocate among the ancients; while, I suppose, even modern scholarship sympathizes with that early declaration of the redoubtable Salmasius, when, looking about for an example of the truly obscure for the benefit of those who found obscurity in the sacred books, he protested that this particular play leaves them all behind in this respect, with their "Hebraisms, Syriasms, Hellenisms, and the whole of such bag and baggage."¹ For, over and above the purposed ambiguity of the Chorus, the text is sadly corrupt, probably interpolated, and certainly mutilated; and no unlearned person enjoys the scholar's privilege of trying his fancy upon each obstacle whenever he comes to a stoppage, and effectually clearing the way by suppressing what seems to lie in it.

All I can say for the present performance is, that I have done as I would be done by, if need were. Should anybody, without need, honour my translation by a comparison with the original,

¹ "Quis Æschylum possit affirmare Græce nunc scienti magis patere explicabilem quam Evangelia aut Epistolas Apostolicas? Unus ejus Agamemnon obscuritate superat quantum est librorum sacrorum cum suis Hebraismis et Syriasms et tota Hellenistica suppellectili vel farragine."

SALMASIUS *de Hellenistica*, Epist. Dedic.

AGAMEMNON

I beg him to observe that, following no editor exclusively, I keep to the earlier readings so long as sense can be made out of them, but disregard, I hope, little of importance in recent criticism so far as I have fallen in with it. Fortunately, the poorest translation, provided only it be faithful,—though it reproduce all the artistic confusion of tenses, moods, and persons, with which the original teems,—will not only suffice to display what an eloquent friend maintains to be the all-in-all of poetry—"the action of the piece"—but may help to illustrate his assurance that "the Greeks are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style: their expression is so excellent because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence, because it is so simple and so well subordinated, because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys . . . not a word wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in, stroke on stroke!"¹ So may all happen!

Just a word more on the subject of my spelling—in a transcript from the Greek and there exclusively—Greek names and places precisely as does the Greek author. I began this practice, with great innocency of intention, some six-and-thirty years ago. Leigh Hunt, I remember, was accustomed to speak of his gratitude, when ignorant of Greek, to those writers (like Goldsmith) who had obliged him by using English characters, so that he might relish, for instance, the smooth quality of such a phrase as "hapalunetai galené;" he said also that Shelley was indignant at "Firenze" having displaced the

¹ *Poems by Matthew Arnold, Preface.*

AGAMEMNON

Dantesque "Fiorenza," and would contemptuously English the intruder "Firence." I supposed I was doing a simple thing enough: but there has been till lately much astonishment at *os*, and *us*, *ai* and *oi*, representing the same letters in Greek. Of a sudden, however, whether in translation or out of it, everybody seems committing the offence, although the adoption of *u* for *υ* still presents such difficulty that it is a wonder how we have hitherto escaped "Eyrripides." But there existed a sturdy Briton who, Ben Jonson informs us, wrote "The Life of the Emperor Anthony Pie"—whom we now acquiesce in as Antoninus Pius: for "with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes satin." Yet there is, on all sides, much profession of respect for what Keats called "vowelled Greek"—"consonanted," one would expect; and, in a criticism upon a late admirable translation of something of my own, it was deplored that, in a certain verse corresponding in measure to the fourteenth of the sixth Pythian Ode, "neither Professor Jebb in his Greek, nor Mr. Browning in his English, could emulate that matchlessly musical γόνον ἰδὼν κάλλιστον ἀνδρῶν." Now, undoubtedly, "Seeing her son the fairest of men" has more sense than sound to boast of: but then, would not an Italian roll us out "Rimirando il figliuolo bellissimo degli uomini!" whereat Pindar, no less than Professor Jebb and Mr. Browning, τριακτῆρος οἵχεται τυχών.

It is recorded in the annals of Art¹ that there was once upon a time, practising so far north as Stockholm, a painter and picture-cleaner—sire of a less unhappy son—Old Muytens: and the annalist,

¹ *Lettres à un jeune Prince, traduites du Suédois.*

AGAMEMNON

Baron de Tessé, has not concealed his profound dissatisfaction at Old Muytens' conceit "to have himself had something to do with the work of whatever master of eminence might pass through his hands." Whence it was,—the Baron goes on to deplore,—that much detriment was done to that excellent piece "The Recognition of Achilles," by Rubens, through the perversity of Old Muytens, "who must needs take on him to beautify every nymph of the twenty by the bestowment of a widened eye and an enlarged mouth." I, at least, have left eyes and mouths everywhere as I found them, and this conservatism is all that claims praise for—what is, after all, ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος αἰοιδά. No, neither "uncommanded" nor "unrewarded:" since it was commanded of me by my venerated friend Thomas Carlyle, and rewarded will it indeed become if I am permitted to dignify it by the prefatory insertion of his dear and noble name.

R. B.

LONDON: *October 1st, 1877.*

PERSONS

Warder

Choros of Old Men

KLUTAIMNESTRA

TALTHUBIOS, *Herald*

AGAMEMNON

KASSANDRA

AIGISTHOS

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS

1877

WARDER

THE gods I ask deliverance from these labours,
Watch of a year's length whereby, slumbering
through it

On the Atreidai's roofs on elbow,—dog-like—
I know of nightly star-groups the assemblage,
And those that bring to men winter and summer 5
Bright dynasts, as they pride them in the æther
—Stars, when they wither, and the uprisings of them.

And now on ward I wait the torch's token,
The glow of fire, shall bring from Troia message
And word of capture : so prevails audacious 10
The man's-way-planning hoping heart of woman.
But when I, driven from night-rest, dew-drenched
hold to

This couch of mine—not looked upon by visions,
Since fear instead of sleep still stands beside me,
So as that fast I fix in sleep no eyelids— 15

And when to sing or chirp a tune I fancy,
For slumber such song-remedy infusing,
I wail then, for this House's fortune groaning,
Not, as of old, after the best ways governed.
Now, lucky be deliverance from these labours, 20
At good news—the appearing dusky fire !

O hail, thou lamp of night, a day-long lightness

AGAMEMNON

Revealing, and of dances the ordainment !

Halloo, halloo !

To Agamemnon's wife I show, by shouting, 25

That, from bed starting up at once, i' the household

Joyous acclaim, good-omened to this torch-blaze,

She send aloft, if haply Ilion's city

Be taken, as the beacon boasts announcing.

Ay, and, for me, myself will dance a prelude, 30

For, that my masters' dice drop right, I 'll reckon :

Since thrice-six has it thrown to me, this signal.

Well, may it hap that, as he comes, the loved hand

O'the household's lord I may sustain with this hand!

As for the rest, I 'm mute : on tongue a big ox 35

Has trodden. Yet this House, if voice it take
should,

Most plain would speak. So, willing I myself speak

To those who know : to who know not—I 'm
blankness.

CHOROS

The tenth year this, since Priamos' great match,

King Menelaos, Agamemnon King, 40

—The strenuous yoke-pair of the Atreidai's honour

Two-throned, two-sceptred, whereof Zeus was
donor—

Did from this land the aid, the armament despatch,

The thousand-sailored force of Argives clamouring

“Ares” from out the indignant breast, as fling 45

Passion forth vultures which, because of grief

Away,—as are their young ones,—with the thief,

Lofty above their brood-nests wheel in ring,

Row round and round with oar of either wing,

Lament the bedded chicks, lost labour that was
love : 50

Which hearing, one above

—Whether Apollon, Pan or Zeus—that wail,

AGAMEMNON

Sharp-piercing bird-shriek of the guests who fare
Housemates with gods in air—
Suchanone sends, against who these assail, 55
What, late-sent, shall not fail
Of punishing—Erinus. Here as there,
The Guardian of the Guest, Zeus, the excelling one,
Sends against Alexandros either son
Of Atreus : for that wife, the many-husbanded, 60
Appointing many a tug that tries the limb,
While the knee plays the prop in dust, while, shred
To morsels, lies the spear-shaft ; in those grim
Marriage-prolusions when their Fury wed
Danaoi and Troes, both alike. All 's said : 65
Things are where things are, and, as fate has willed,
So shall they be fulfilled.
Not gently-grieving, not just doling out
The drops of expiation—no, nor tears distilled—
Shall he we know of bring the hard about 70
To soft—that intense ire
At those mock rites unsanctified by fire.
But we pay nought here : through our flesh, age-
weighed,
Left out from who gave aid
In that day,—we remain, 75
Staying on staves a strength
The equal of a child's at length.
For when young marrow in the breast doth reign,
That 's the old man's match,—Ares out of place
In either : but in oldest age's case, 80
Foliage a-fading, why, he wends his way
On three feet, and, no stronger than a child,
Wanders about gone wild,
A dream in day.

But thou, Tundareus' daughter, Klutaimnestra
queen, 85

AGAMEMNON

What need? What new? What having heard
or seen,
By what announcement's tidings, everywhere
Settest thou, round about, the sacrifice a-flare? .
For, of all gods the city-swaying,
Those supernal, those infernal, 90
Those of the fields', those of the mart's obeying,—
The altars blaze with gifts;
And here and there, heaven-high the torch uplifts
Flame—medicated with persuasions mild,
With foul admixture unbeguiled— 95
Of holy unguent, from the clotted chrism
Brought from the palace, safe in its abysm.
Of these things, speaking what may be indeed
Both possible and lawful to concede,
Healer do thou become!—of this solicitude 100
Which, now, stands plainly forth of evil mood,
And, then . . . but from oblations, hope, to-day
Gracious appearing, wards away
From soul the insatiate care,
The sorrow at my breast, devouring there! 105

Empowered am I to sing
The omens, what their force which, journeying,
Rejoiced the potentates:
(For still, from God, inflates
My breast song-suasion: age, 110
Born to the business, still such war can wage)
—How the fierce bird against the Teukris land
Despatched, with spear and executing hand,
The Achaian's two-throned empery—o'er Hellas'
youth
Two rulers with one mind: 115
The birds' king to these kings of ships, on high,
—The black sort, and the sort that's white
behind,—

AGAMEMNON

Appearing by the palace, on the spear-throw side,
In right sky-regions, visible far and wide,—
Devouring a hare-creature, great with young, 120
Baulked of more racings they, as she from whom
they sprung !
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail !
But may the good prevail !

The prudent army-prophet seeing two
The Atreidai, two their tempers, knew 125
Those feasting on the hare
The armament-conductors were ;
And thus he spoke, explaining signs in view.
“ In time, this outset takes the town of Priamos :
But all before its towers,—the people’s wealth that
was, 130
Of flocks and herds,—as sure, shall booty-sharing
thence
Drain to the dregs away, by battle violence.
Only, have care lest grudge of any god disturb
With cloud the unsullied shine of that great force,
the curb
Of Troia, struck with damp 135
Beforehand in the camp !
For envyingly is
The virgin Artemis
Toward—her father’s flying hounds—this House—
The sacrificers of the piteous 140
And cowering beast,
Brood and all, ere the birth : she hates the eagles’
feast.
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail !
But may the good prevail !

“ Thus ready is the beauteous one with help 145
To those small dewdrop-things fierce lions whelp,

AGAMEMNON

And udder-loving litter of each brute
 That roams the mead; and therefore makes she suit,
 The fair one, for fulfilment to the end
 Of things these signs portend— 150
 Which partly smile, indeed, but partly scowl—
 The phantasms of the fowl.
 I call Ieïos Paian to avert
 She work the Danaoi hurt
 By any thwarting waftures, long and fast 155
 Holdings from sail of ships :
 And sacrifice, another than the last,
 She for herself precipitate—
 Something unlawful, feast for no man's lips,
 Builder of quarrels, with the House cognate— 160
 Having in awe no husband : for remains
 A frightful, backward-darting in the path,
 Wily house-keeping chronicler of wrath,
 That has to punish that old children's fate ! ”
 Such things did Kalchas,—with abundant gains 165
 As well,—vociferate,
 Predictions from the birds, in journeying,
 Above the abode of either king.
 With these, symphonious, sing—
 Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail ! 170
 But may the good prevail !

 Zeus, whosoe'er he be,—if that express
 Aught dear to him on whom I call—
 So do I him address. 175
 I cannot liken out, by all
 Admeasurement of powers,
 Any but Zeus for refuge at such hours,
 If veritably needs I must
 From off my soul its vague care-burthen thrust.

 Not—whosoever was the great of yore, 180
 Bursting to bloom with bravery all round—

AGAMEMNON

Is in our mouths : he was, but is no more.
 And who it was that after came to be,
 Met the thrice-throwing wrestler,—he
 Is also gone to ground. 185
 But “Zeus”—if any, heart and soul, that name—
 Shouting the triumph-praise—proclaim,
 Complete in judgment shall that man be found.
 Zeus, who leads onward mortals to be wise,
 Appoints that suffering masterfully teach. 190
 In sleep, before the heart of each,
 A woe-remembering travail sheds in dew
 Discretion,—ay, and melts the unwilling too
 By what, perchance, may be a graciousness
 Of gods, enforced no less,— 195
 As they, commanders of the crew,
 Assume the awful seat.

And then the old leader of the Achaian fleet,
 Disparaging no seer—
 With bated breath to suit misfortune’s inrush here 200
 —(What time it laboured, that Achaian host,
 By stay from sailing,—every pulse at length
 Emptied of vital strength,—
 Hard over Kalchis shore-bound, current-croßt
 In Aulis station,—while the winds which post 205
 From Strumon, ill-delayers, famine-fraught,
 Tempters of man to sail where harbourage is naught,
 Spend thrifts of ships and cables, turning time
 To twice the length,—these carded, by delay,
 To less and less away 210
 The Argeians’ flowery prime :
 And when a remedy more grave and grand
 Than aught before,—yea, for the storm and
 dearth,—
 The prophet to the foremost in command
 Shrieked forth, as cause of this 215

AGAMEMNON

Adducing Artemis, .
So that the Atreidai striking staves on earth
Could not withhold the tear)—
Then did the king, the elder, speak this clear.

“ Heavy the fate, indeed,—to disobey ! 220
Yet heavy if my child I slay,
The adornment of my household : with the tide
Of virgin-slaughter, at the altar-side,
A father's hands defiling : which the way
Without its evils, say ? 225
How shall I turn fleet-fugitive,
Failing of duty to allies ?
Since for a wind-abating sacrifice
And virgin blood,—’t is right they strive,
Nay, madden with desire. 230
Well may it work them—this that they require ! ”

But when he underwent necessity's
Yoke-trace,—from soul blowing unhallowed
change
Unclean, abominable,—thence—another man—
The audacious mind of him began 235
Its wildest range.
For this it is gives mortals hardihood—
Some vice-devising miserable mood
Of madness, and first woe of all the brood.
The sacrificer of his daughter—strange !— 240
He dared become, to expedite
Woman-avenging warfare,—anchors weighed
With such prelusive rite !

Prayings and callings “ Father ”—naught they
made
Of these, and of the virgin-age,— 245
Captains heart-set on war to wage !

AGAMEMNON

His ministrants, vows done, the father bade—
 Kid-like, above the altar, swathed in pall,
 Take her—lift high, and have no fear at all,
 Head-downward, and the fair mouth's guard 250
 And frontage hold,—press hard
 From utterance a curse against the House
 By dint of bit—violence bridling speech.
 And as to ground her saffron-vest she shed,
 She smote the sacrificers all and each 255
 With arrow sweet and piteous,
 From the eye only sped,—
 Significant of will to use a word,
 Just as in pictures : since, full many a time,
 In her sire's guest-hall, by the well-heaped board 260
 Had she made music,—lovingly with chime
 Of her chaste voice, that unpolluted thing,
 Honoured the third libation,—paian that should
 bring
 Good fortune to the sire she loved so well.

What followed—those things I nor saw nor
 tell. 265
 But Kalchas' arts,—whate'er they indicate,—
 Miss of fulfilment never : it is fate.
 True, justice makes, in sufferers, a desire
 To know the future woe préponderate.
 But—hear before is need ? 270
 To that, farewell and welcome ! 't is the same,
 indeed,
 As grief beforehand : clearly, part for part,
 Conformably to Kalchas' art,
 Shall come the event.
 But be they as they may, things subsequent,— 275
 What is to do, prosperity betide
 E'en as we wish it !—we, the next allied,
 Sole guarding barrier of the Apian land.

AGAMEMNON

I am come, reverencing power in thee,
O Klutaimnestra ! For 't is just we bow 280
To the ruler's wife,—the male-seat man-bereaved.
But if thou, having heard good news,—or none,—
For good news' hope dost sacrifice thus wide,
I would hear gladly : art thou mute,—no grudge !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Good-news-announcer, may—as is the by-word— 285
Morn become, truly,—news from Night his
mother !
But thou shalt learn joy past all hope of hearing.
Priamos' city have the Argeioi taken.

CHOROS

How sayest ? The word, from want of faith,
escaped me.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Troia the Achaioi hold : do I speak plainly ? 290

CHOROS

Joy overcreeps me, calling forth the tear-drop.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Right ! for, that glad thou art, thine eye convicts
thee.

CHOROS

For—what to thee, of all this, trusty token ?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

What 's here ! how else ? unless the god have
cheated.

CHOROS

Haply thou flattering shows of dreams respectest ? 295

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

No fancy would I take of soul sleep-burthened.

CHOROS

But has there puffed thee up some unwinged omen?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

As a young maid's my mind thou mockest grossly.

CHOROS

Well, at what time was—even sacked, the city?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Of this same mother Night—the dawn, I tell thee. 300

CHOROS

And who of messengers could reach this swiftness?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Hephaistos—sending a bright blaze from Idé.
Beacon did beacon send, from fire the poster,
Hitherward : Idé to the rock Hermaian
Of Lemnos : and a third great torch o' the island 305
Zeus' seat received in turn, the Athoan summit.
And,—so upsoaring as to stride sea over,
The strong lamp-voyager, and all for joyance—
Did the gold-glorious splendour, any sun like,
Pass on—the pine-tree—to Makistos' watch-place ; 310
Who did not,—tardy,—caught, no wits about him,
By sleep,—decline his portion of the missive.
And far the beacon's light, on stream Euripos
Arriving, made aware Messapios' warders,
And up they lit in turn, played herald onwards, 315
Kindling with flame a heap of grey old heather.
And, strengthening still, the lamp, decaying
nowise,

AGAMEMNON

Springing o'er Plain Asopos,—full-moon-fashion
Effulgent,—toward the crag of Mount Kithairon,
Roused a new rendering-up of fire the escort— 320
And light, far escort, lacked no recognition
O' the guard—as burning more than burnings
told you.

And over Lake Gorgopis light went leaping,
And, at Mount Aigioplanktos safe arriving,
Enforced the law—"to never stint the fire-stuff." 325
And they send, lighting up with ungrudged vigour,
Of flame a huge beard, ay, the very foreland
So as to strike above, in burning onward,
The look-out which commands the Strait Saronic.
Then did it dart until it reached the outpost 330
Mount Arachnaïos here, the city's neighbour ;
And then darts to this roof of the Atreidai
This light of Idé's fire not unforefathered !
Such are the rules prescribed the flambeau-bearers :
He beats that 's first and also last in running. 335
Such is the proof and token I declare thee,
My husband having sent me news from Troia.

CHOROS

The gods, indeed, anon will I pray, woman !
But now, these words to hear, and sate my wonder
Thoroughly, I am fain—if twice thou tell them. 340

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Troia do the Achaioi hold, this same day.
I think a noise—no mixture—reigns i' the city.
Sour wine and unguent pour thou in one vessel—
Standers-apart, not lovers, wouldst thou style
them :
And so, of captives and of conquerors, partwise 345
The voices are to hear, of fortune diverse.
For those, indeed, upon the bodies prostrate

AGAMEMNON

Of husbands, brothers, children upon parents
—The old men, from a throat that 's free no longer,
Shriekingly wail the death-doom of their dearest : 350
While these—the after-battle hungry labour,
Which prompts night-faring, marshals them to
breakfast

On the town's store, according to no billet
Of sharing, but as each drew lot of fortune.
In the spear-captured Troic habitations 355
House they already : from the frosts upæthral
And dews delivered, will they, luckless creatures,
Without a watch to keep, slumber all night
through.

And if they fear the gods, the city-guarders,
And the gods' structures of the conquered country, 360
They may not—capturers—soon in turn be captive.
But see no prior lust befall the army
To sack things sacred—by gain-cravings van-
quished !

For there needs homeward the return's salvation,
To round the new limb back o' the double race-
course. 365

And guilty to the gods if came the army,
Awakened up the sorrow of those slaughtered
Might be—should no outbursting evils happen.
But may good beat—no turn to see i' the balance !
For, many benefits I want the gain of. 370

CHOROS

Woman, like prudent man thou kindly speakest.
And I, thus having heard thy trusty tokens,
The gods to rightly hail forthwith prepare me ;
For, grace that must be paid has crowned our
labours.

O Zeus the king, and friendly Night

375

AGAMEMNON

Of these brave boons' bestower—
 Thou who didst fling on Troia's every tower
 The o'er-roofing snare, that neither great thing
 might,
 Nor any of the young ones, overpass
 Captivity's great sweep-net—one and all 380
 Of Até held in thrall !
 Ay, Zeus I fear—the guest's friend great—who was
 The doer of this, and long since bent
 The bow on Alexandros with intent
 That neither wide o' the white 385
 Nor o'er the stars the foolish dart should light.
 The stroke of Zeus—they have it, as men say !
 This, at least, from the source track forth we may !
 As he ordained, so has he done.
 " No "—said someone— 390
 " The gods think fit to care
 Nowise for mortals, such
 As those by whom the good and fair
 Of things denied their touch
 Is trampled ! " but he was profane. 395
 That they do care, has been made plain
 To offspring of the over-bold,
 Outbreathing " Ares " greater than is just—
 Houses that spill with more than they can hold,
 More than is best for man. Be man's what must 400
 Keep harm off, so that in himself he find
 Sufficiency—the well-endowed of mind !
 For there 's no bulwark in man's wealth to him
 Who, through a surfeit, kicks—into the dim
 And disappearing—Right's great altar.

Yes— 405

It urges him, the sad persuasiveness,
 Até's insufferable child that schemes
 Treason beforehand : and all cure is vain.

AGAMEMNON

It is not hidden : out it glares again,
 A light dread-lamping-mischief, just as gleams 410
 The badness of the bronze ;
 Through rubbing, puttings to the touch,
 Black-clotted is he, judged at once.
 He seeks—the boy—a flying bird to clutch,
 The insufferable brand 415
 Setting upon the city of his land
 Whereof not any god hears prayer ;
 While him who brought about such evils there,
 That unjust man, the god in grapple throws.
 Such an one, Paris goes 420
 Within the Atreidai's house—
 Shamed the guest's board by robbery of the spouse.

And, leaving to her townsmen throngs a-spread
 With shields, and spear-thrusts of sea-armament,
 And bringing Ilion, in a dowry's stead, 425
 Destruction—swiftly through the gates she went,
 Daring the undareable. But many a groan outbroke
 From prophets of the House as thus they spoke.
 “Woe, woe the House, the House and Rulers,—woe
 The marriage-bed and dints 430
 A husband's love imprints !
 There she stands silent ! meets no honour—no
 Shame—sweetest still to see of things gone long ago !
 And, through desire of one across the main,
 A ghost will seem within the house to reign : 435
 And hateful to the husband is the grace
 Of well-shaped statues : from—in place of eyes
 Those blanks—all Aphrodite dies.

“ But dream-appearing mournful fantasies—
 There they stand, bringing grace that 's vain. 440
 For vain 't is, when brave things one seems to view ;
 The fantasy has floated off, hands through ;
 Gone, that appearance,—nowise left to creep,—

AGAMEMNON

On wings, the servants in the paths of sleep !”
Woes, then, in household and on hearth, are such 445
As these—and woes surpassing these by much.
But not these only : everywhere—
For those who from the land
Of Hellas issued in a band,
Sorrow, the heart must bear, 450
Sits in the home of each, conspicuous there.
Many a circumstance, at least,
Touches the very breast.
For those
Whom any sent away,—he knows : 455
And in the live man's stead,
Armour and ashes reach
The house of each.

For Ares, gold-exchanger for the dead,
And balance-holder in the fight o' the spear, 460
Due-weight from Ilion sends—
What moves the tear on tear—
A charred scrap to the friends ?
Filling with well-packed ashes every urn, ,
For man—that was—the sole return. 465
And they groan—praising much, the while,
Now this man as experienced in the strife,
Now that, fallen nobly on a slaughtered pile,
Because of—not his own—another's wife.
But things there be, one barks, 470
When no man harks :
A surreptitious grief that 's grudge
Against the Atreidai who first sought the judge.
But some there, round the rampart, have
In Ilian earth, each one his grave : 475
All fair-formed as at birth,
It hid them—what they have and hold—the hostile
earth.

AGAMEMNON

And big with anger goes the city's word,
 And pays a debt by public curse incurred.
 And ever with me—as about to hear 480
 A something night-involved—remains my fear :
 Since of the many-slayers—not
 Unwatching are the gods.
 The black Erinues, at due periods—
 Whoever gains the lot 485
 Of fortune with no right—
 Him, by life's strain and stress
 Back-again-beaten from success,
 They strike blind : and among the out-of-sight
 For who has got to be, avails no might. 490
 The being praised outrageously
 Is grave, for at the eyes of such an one
 Is launched, from Zeus, the thunder-stone.
 Therefore do I decide
 For so much and no more prosperity 495
 Than of his envy passes unespied.
 Neither a city-sacker would I be,
 Nor life, myself by others captive, see.

A swift report has gone our city through,
 From fire, the good-news messenger : if true, 500
 Who knows? Or is it not a god-sent lie?
 Who is so childish and deprived of sense
 That, having, at announcements of the flame
 Thus novel, felt his own heart fired thereby,
 He then shall at a change of evidence, 505
 Be worsted just the same?
 It is conspicuous in a woman's nature,
 Before its view to take a grace for granted :
 Too trustful,—on her boundary, usurpature
 Is swiftly made ; 510
 But swiftly, too, decayed,
 The glory perishes by woman vaunted.

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Soon shall we know—of these light-bearing torches,
And beacons and exchanges, fire with fire—
If they are true, indeed, or if, dream-fashion, 515
This gladsome light came and deceived our judgment.

Yon herald from the shore I see, o'ershadowed
With boughs of olive: dust, mud's thirsty brother,
Close neighbours on his garb, thus testify me
That neither voiceless, nor yet kindling for thee 520
Mountain-wood-flame, shall he explain by fire-smoke:

But either tell out more the joyance, speaking. . .
Word contrary to which, I aught but love it!
For may good be—to good that 's known—appendage!

CHOROS

Whoever prays for aught else to this city 525
—May he himself reap fruit of his mind's error!

HERALD

Ha, my forefathers' soil of earth Argeian!
Thee, in this year's tenth light, am I returned to—
Of many broken hopes, on one hope chancing;
For never prayed I, in this earth Argeian 530
Dying, to share my part in tomb the dearest.
Now, hail thou earth, and hail thou also, sunlight,
And Zeus, the country's lord, and king the Puthian
From bow no longer urging at us arrows!
Enough, beside Skamandros, cam'st thou adverse: 535
Now, contrary, be saviour thou and healer,
O king Apollon! And gods conquest-granting,
All—I invoke too, and my tutelary
Hermes, dear herald, heralds' veneration,—

AGAMEMNON

And Heroes our forthsenders,—friendly, once more 540
The army to receive, the war-spear's leavings !
Ha, mansions of my monarchs, roofs beloved,
And awful seats, and deities sun-fronting—
Receive with pomp your monarch, long time
absent !

For he comes bringing light in night-time to you, 545
In common with all these—king Agamemnon.
But kindly greet him—for clear shows your duty—
Who has dug under Troia with the mattock
Of Zeus the Avenger, whereby plains are out-
ploughed,

Altars unrecognizable, and gods' shrines, 550
And the whole land's seed thoroughly has perished.
And such a yoke-strap having cast round Troia,
The elder king Atreides, happy man—he
Comes to be honoured, worthiest of what mortals
Now are. Nor Paris nor the accomplice-city 555
Outvaunts their deed as more than they are done-
by :

For, in a suit for rape and theft found guilty,
He missed of plunder and, in one destruction,
Fatherland, house and home has mowed to atoms :
Debts the Priamidai have paid twice over. 560

CHOROS

Hail, herald from the army of Achaïans !

HERALD

I hail :—to die, will gainsay gods no longer !

CHOROS

Love of this fatherland did exercise thee ?

HERALD

So that I weep, at least, with joy, my eyes full.

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

What, of this gracious sickness were ye gainers? 565

HERALD

How now? instructed, I this speech shall master.

CHOROS

For those who loved you back, with longing
stricken.

HERALD

This land yearned for the yearning army, say'st
thou?

CHOROS

So as to set me oft, from dark mind, groaning.

HERALD

Whence came this ill mind—hatred to the army? 570

CHOROS

Of old, I use, for mischief's physic, silence.

HERALD

And how, the chiefs away, did you fear any?

CHOROS

So that now,—late thy word,—much joy were—
dying!

HERALD

For well have things been worked out: these,—
in much time,
Some of them, one might say, had luck in falling, 575
While some were faulty: since who, gods excepted,

AGAMEMNON

Goes, through the whole time of his life, ungrieving?
 For labours should I tell of, and bad lodgments,
 Narrow deckways ill-strewn, too,—what the day's
 woe

We did not groan at getting for our portion? 580
 As for land-things, again, on went more hatred!
 Since beds were ours hard by the foemen's
 ramparts,

And, out of heaven and from the earth, the meadow
 Dews kept a-sprinkle, an abiding damage
 Of vestures, making hair a wild-beast matting. 585
 Winter, too, if one told of it—bird-slaying—
 Such as, unbearable, Idaian snow brought—
 Or heat, when waveless, on its noontide couches
 Without a wind, the sea would slumber falling
 —Why must one mourn these? O'er and gone
 is labour : 590

O'er and gone is it, even to those dead ones,
 So that no more again they mind uprising.
 Why must we tell in numbers those deprived ones,
 And the live man be vexed with fate's fresh
 outbreak?

Rather, I bid full farewell to misfortunes! 595
 For us, the left from out the Argeian army,
 The gain beats, nor does sorrow counterbalance.
 So that 't is fitly boasted of, this sunlight,
 By us, o'er sea and land the aery flyers,
 “Troia at last taking, the band of Argives 600
 Hang up such trophies to the gods of Hellas
 Within their domes—new glory to grow ancient!”
 Such things men having heard must praise the
 city

And army-leaders : and the grace which wrought
 them—

Of Zeus, shall honoured be. Thou hast my
 whole word. 605

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

O'ercome by words, their sense I do not gainsay.
For, aye this breeds youth in the old—"to learn
well."

But these things most the house and Klutaimnestra
Concern, 't is likely: while they make me rich, too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

I shouted long ago, indeed, for joyance, 610
When came that first night-messenger of fire
Proclaiming Ilion's capture and dispersion.
And someone, girding me, said, "Through fire-
bearers

Persuaded—Troia to be sacked now, thinkest?
Truly, the woman's way,—high to lift heart up!" 615
By such words I was made seem wit-bewildered:
Yet still I sacrificed; and,—female-song with,—
A shout one man and other, through the city,
Set up, congratulating in the gods' seats,
Soothing the incense-eating flame right fragrant. 620
And now, what 's more, indeed, why need'st thou
tell me?

I of the king himself shall learn the whole word:
And,—as may best be,—I my revered husband
Shall hasten, as he comes back, to receive: for—
What 's to a wife sweeter to see than this light 625
(Her husband, by the god saved, back from war-
fare)

So as to open gates? This tell my husband—
To come at soonest to his loving city.
A faithful wife at home may he find, coming!
Such an one as he left—the dog o' the household— 630
Trusty to him, adverse to the ill-minded,
And, in all else, the same: no signet-impress
Having done harm to, in that time's duration.

AGAMEMNON

I know nor pleasure, nor blameworthy converse
With any other man more than—bronze-dippings! 635

HERALD

Such boast as this—brimful of the veracious—
Is, for a high-born dame, not bad to send forth!

CHOROS

Ay, she spoke thus to thee—that hast a knowledge
From clear interpreters—a speech most seemly.
But speak thou, herald! Meneleos I ask of: 640
If he, returning, back in safety also
Will come with you—this land's beloved chieftain?

HERALD

There's no way I might say things false and
pleasant
For friends to reap the fruits of through a long time.

CHOROS

How then if, speaking good, things true thou
chance on? 645

HERALD

For not well-hidden things become they, sundered.
The man has vanished from the Achaic army,
He and his ship too. I announce no falsehood.

CHOROS

Whether forth-putting openly from Ilion,
Or did storm—wide woe—snatch him from the
army? 650

HERALD

Like topping bowman, thou hast touched the
target,
And a long sorrow hast succinctly spoken.

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

Whether, then, of him, as a live or dead man
Was the report by other sailors bruited ?

HERALD

Nobody knows so as to tell out clearly
Excepting Helios who sustains earth's nature. 655

CHOROS

How say'st thou then, did storm the naval army
Attack and end, by the celestials' anger ?

HERALD

It suits not to defile a day auspicious
With ill-announcing speech : distinct each god's
due : 660

And when a messenger with gloomy visage
To a city bears a fall'n host's woes—God ward
off !—

One popular wound that happens to the city,
And many sacrificed from many households—
Men, scourged by that two-thonged whip Ares
loves so, 665

Double spear-headed curse, bloody yoke-
couple,—

Of woes like these, doubtless, whoe'er comes
weighted,

Him does it suit to sing the Erinues' paian.
But who, of matters saved a glad-news-bringer,
Comes to a city in good estate rejoicing. . . . 670
How shall I mix good things with evil, telling
Of storm against the Achaioi, urged by gods'
wrath ?

For they swore league, being arch-foes before that,
Fire and the sea : and plighted troth approved they,

AGAMEMNON

Destroying the unhappy Argeian army. 675
 At night began the bad-wave-outbreak evils ;
 For, ships against each other Threikian breezes
 Shattered : and these, butted at in a fury
 By storm and typhoon, with surge rain-resound-
 ing,—

Off they went, vanished, thro' a bad herd's
 whirling. 680

And, when returned the brilliant light of Helios,
 We view the Aigaian sea on flower with corpses
 Of men Achaian and with naval ravage.

But us indeed, and ship, unhurt i' the hull too,
 Either someone outstole us or outprayed us— 685
 Some god—no man it was the tiller touching.

And Fortune, saviour, willing on our ship sat.
 So as it neither had in harbour wave-surge
 Nor ran aground against a shore all rocky.

And then, the water-Haides having fled from 690
 In the white day, not trusting to our fortune,
 We chewed the cud in thoughts—this novel sorrow
 O' the army labouting and badly pounded.

And now—if anyone of them is breathing—
 They talk of us as having perished : why not ? 695

And we—that they the same fate have, imagine.
 May it be for the best ! Meneleos, then,
 Foremost and specially to come, expect thou !

If (that is) any ray o' the sun reports him 700
 Living and seeing too—by Zeus' contrivings,
 Not yet disposed to quite destroy the lineage—

Some hope is he shall come again to household,
 Having heard such things, know, thou truth art
 hearing !

CHOROS

Who may he have been that named thus wholly
 with exactitude—

AGAMEMNON

(Was he someone whom we see not, by forecast-
 ings of the future 705
 Guiding tongue in happy mood ?)
 —Her with battle for a bridegroom, on all sides
 contention-wooed,
 Helena ? Since—mark the suture !—
 Ship's-Hell, Man's-Hell, City's-Hell,
 From the delicately-pompous curtains that pavilion
 well, 710
 Forth, by favour of the gale
 Of earth-born Zephuros did she sail.
 Many shield-bearers, leaders of the pack,
 Sailed too upon their track,
 Theirs who had directed oar, 715
 Then visible no more,
 To Simois' leaf-luxuriant shore—
 For sake of strife all gore !

To Ilion Wrath, fulfilling her intent,
 This marriage-care—the rightly named so—sent : 720
 In after-time, for the tables' abuse
 And that of the hearth-partaker Zeus,
 Bringing to punishment
 Those who honoured with noisy throat
 The honour of the bride, the hymenæal note 725
 Which did the kinsfolk then to singing urge.
 But, learning a new hymn for that which was,
 The ancient city of Priamos
 Groans probably a great and general dirge,
 Denominating Paris 730
 “The man that miserably marries : ”—
 She who, all the while before,
 A life, that was a general dirge
 For citizens' unhappy slaughter, bore.

And thus a man, by no milk's help, 735

AGAMEMNON

Within his household reared a lion's whelp
That loved the teat
In life's first festal stage :
Gentle as yet,
A true child-lover, and, to men of age, 740
A thing whereat pride warms ;
And oft he had it in his arms
Like any new-born babe, bright-faced, to hand
Wagging its tail, at belly's strict command.

But in due time upgrown, 745
The custom of progenitors was shown :
For—thanks for sustenance repaying
With ravage of sheep slaughtered—
It made unbidden feast ;
With blood the house was watered, 750
To household came a woe there was no staying :
Great mischief many-slaying !
From God it was—some priest
Of Até, in the house, by nurture thus increased.
At first, then, to the city of Ilion went 755
A soul, as I might say, of windless calm—
Wealth's quiet ornament,
An eyes'-dart bearing balm,
Love's spirit-biting flower.
But—from the true course bending— 760
She brought about, of marriage, bitter ending :
Ill-resident, ill-mate, in power
Passing to the Priamidai—by sending
Of Hospitable Zeus—
Erinus for a bride,—to make brides mourn, her
dower. 765

Spoken long ago
Was the ancient saying
Still among mortals staying :

AGAMEMNON

“ Man's great prosperity at height of rise
Engenders offspring nor unchilded dies ; 770
And, from good fortune, to such families,
Buds forth insatiate woe.”

Whereas, distinct from any,
Of my own mind I am :
For 't is the unholy deed begets the many, 775
Resembling each its dam.

Of households that correctly estimate,
Ever a beauteous child is born of Fate.
But ancient Arrogance delights to generate
Arrogance, young and strong mid mortals' sorrow, 780
Or now, or then, when comes the appointed
morrow.

And she bears young Satiety ;
And, fiend with whom nor fight nor war can be,
Unholy Daring—twin black Curses
Within the household, children like their nurses. 785

But Justice shines in smoke-grimed habitations,
And honours the well-omened life ;
While,—gold-besprinkled stations
Where the hands' filth is rife,
With backward-turning eyes 790
Leaving,—to holy seats she hies,
Not worshipping the power of wealth
Stamped with applause by stealth :
And to its end directs each thing begun.

Approach then, my monarch, of Troia the sacker,
of Atreus the son ! 795

How ought I address thee, how ought I revere
thee,—nor yet overhitting
Nor yet underbending the grace that is fitting ?
Many of mortals hasten to honour the seeming-
to-be—

AGAMEMNON

Passing by justice : and, with the ill-faring, to
 groan as he groans all are free.
 But no bite of the sorrow their liver has reached to : 800
 They say with the joyful,—one outside on each, too,
 As they force to a smile smileless faces.
 But whoever is good at distinguishing races
 In sheep of his flock—it is not for the eyes
 Of a man to escape such a shepherd's surprise, 805
 As they seem, from a well-wishing mind,
 In watery friendship to fawn and be kind.
 Thou to me, then, indeed, sending an army for
 Helena's sake,
 (I will not conceal it) wast—oh, by no help of the
 Muses !—depicted
 Not well of thy midriff the rudder directing,—con-
 victed 810
 Of bringing a boldness they did not desire to the
 men with existence at stake.
 But now—from no outside of mind, nor unlov-
 ingly—gracious thou art
 To those who have ended the labour, fulfilling
 their part ;
 And in time shalt thou know, by inquiry instructed,
 Who of citizens justly, and who not to purpose,
 the city conducted. 815

AGAMEMNON

First, indeed, Argos, and the gods, the local,
 'T is right addressing—those with me the partners
 In this return and right things done the city
 Of Priamos : gods who, from no tongue hearing
 The rights o' the cause, for Ilion's fate man-
 slaught'rous 820
 Into the bloody vase, not oscillating,
 Put the vote-pebbles, while, o' the rival vessel,
 Hope rose up to the lip-edge : filled it was not.

AGAMEMNON

By smoke the captured city is still conspicuous :
 Até's burnt offerings live : and, dying with them, 825
 The ash sends forth the fulsome blasts of riches.
 Of these things, to the gods grace many-mindful
 'T is right I render, since both nets outrageous
 We built them round with, and, for sake of woman,
 It did the city to dust—the Argeian monster, 830
 The horse's nestling, the shield-bearing people
 That made a leap, at setting of the Pleiads,
 And, vaulting o'er the tower, the raw-flesh-feeding
 Lion licked up his fill of blood tyrannic.
 I to the gods indeed prolonged this preface ; 835
 But—as for *thy* thought, I remember hearing—
 I say the same, and thou co-pleader hast me.
 Since few of men this faculty is born with—
 To honour, without grudge, their friend, suc-
 cessful.
 For moody, on the heart, a poison seated 840
 Its burthen doubles to who gained the sickness :
 By his own griefs he is himself made heavy,
 And out-of-door prosperity seeing groans at.
 Knowing, I 'd call (for well have I experienced)
 “ Fellowship's mirror,” “ phantom of a shadow,” 845
 Those seeming to be mighty gracious to me :
 While just Odusseus—he who sailed not willing—
 When joined on, was to me the ready trace-horse.
 This of him, whether dead or whether living,
 I say. For other city-and-gods' concernment— 850
 Appointing common courts, in full assemblage
 We will consult. And as for what holds seemly—
 How it may lasting stay well, must be counselled :
 While what has need of medicines Paionian
 We, either burning or else cutting kindly, 855
 Will make endeavour to turn pain from sickness.
 And now into the domes and homes by altar
 Going, I to the gods first raise the right-hand—

AGAMEMNON

They who, far sending, back again have brought me.
And Victory, since she followed, fixed remain she ! 860

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Men, citizens, Argeians here, my worships !
I shall not shame me, consort-loving manners
To tell before you : for in time there dies off
The diffidence from people. Not from others
Learning, I of myself will tell the hard life 865
I bore so long as this man was 'neath Ilion.
First : for a woman, from the male divided,
To sit at home alone, is monstrous evil—
Hearing the many rumours back-revenging :
And for now This to come, now That bring after 870
Woe, and still worsewoe, bawling in the household !
And truly, if so many wounds had chanced on
My husband here, as homeward used to dribble
Report, he's pierced more than a net to speak of !
While, were he dying (as the words abounded) 875
A triple-bodied Geruon the Second,
Plenty above—for loads below I count not—
Of earth a three-share cloak he'd boast of taking,
Once only dying in each several figure !
Because of suchlike rumours back-revenging, 880
Many the halts from my neck, above head,
Others than / loosed—loosed from neck by main
force !
From this cause, sure, the boy stands not beside me—
Possessor of our troth-plights, thine and mine too—
As ought Orestes : be not thou astonished ! 885
For, him brings up our well-disposed guest-captive
Strophios the Phokian—ills that told on both sides
To me predicting—both of thee 'neath Ilion
The danger, and if anarchy's mob-uproar
Should overthrow thy council ; since 't is born with 890
Mortals,—whoe'er has fallen, the more to kick him.

AGAMEMNON

Such an excuse, I think, no cunning carries !
 As for myself—why, of my wails the rushing
 Fountains are dried up : not in them a drop more !
 And in my late-to-bed eyes I have damage, 895
 Bewailing what concerned thee, those torch-
 holdings

For ever unattended to. In dreams—why,
 Beneath the light wing-beats o' the gnat, I woke up
 As he went buzzing—sorrows that concerned thee
 Seeing, that filled more than their fellow-sleep-time. 900
 Now, all this having suffered, from soul grief-free
 I would style this man here the dog o' the stables,
 The saviour forestay of the ship, the high roof's
 Ground-prop, son sole-begotten to his father,
 —Ay, land appearing to the sailors past hope, 905
 Loveliest day to see after a tempest,
 To the wayfaring-one athirst a well-spring,
 —The joy, in short, of 'scaping all that 's—fatal !
 I judge him worth addresses such as these are
 —Envy stand off !—for many those old evils 910
 We underwent. And now, to me—dear headship !—
 Dismount thou from this car, not earthward setting
 The foot of thine, O king, that 's Ilion's spoiler !
 Slave-maids, why tarry ?—whose the task allotted
 To strew the soil o' the road with carpet-spreadings. 915
 Immediately be purple-strewn the pathway,
 So that to home unhopèd may lead him—Justice !
 As for the rest, care shall—by no sleep conquered—
 Dispose things—justly (gods to aid !) appointed.

AGAMEMNON

Offspring of Leda, of my household warder, 920
 Suitably to my absence hast thou spoken,
 For long the speech thou didst outstretch ! But aptly
 To praise—from others ought to go this favour.
 And for the rest,—not me, in woman's fashion,

AGAMEMNON

Mollify, nor—as mode of barbarous man is— 925
To me gape forth a groundward-falling clamour !
Nor, strewing it with garments, make my passage
Envied ! Gods, sure, with these behoves we honour:
But, for a mortal on these varied beauties
To walk—to me, indeed, is nowise fear-free. 930
I say—as man, not god, to me do homage !
Apart from foot-mats both and varied vestures,
Renown is loud, and—not to lose one's senses,
God's greatest gift. Behoves we him call happy
Who has brought life to end in loved well-being. 935
If all things I might manage thus—brave man, I !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Come now, this say, nor feign a feeling to me !

AGAMEMNON

With feeling, know indeed, I do not tamper !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Vowed'st thou to the gods, in fear, to act thus ?

AGAMEMNON

If any, *I* well knew resolve I outspoke. 940

KLUTAIMNESTRA

What think'st thou Priamos had done, thus victor ?

AGAMEMNON

On varied vests—I do think—he had passaged.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Then, do not, struck with awe at human censure. . . .

AGAMEMNON

Well, popular mob-outcry much avails too.

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Ay, but the unenvied is not the much valued. 945

AGAMEMNON

Sure, 't is no woman's part to long for battle.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Why, to the prosperous, even suits a beating.

AGAMEMNON

What? thou this beating us in war dost prize too?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Persuade thee! power, for once, grant *me*—and willing!

AGAMEMNON

But if this seem so to thee—shoes, let someone 950
Loose under, quick—foot's serviceable carriage!
And me, on these sea-products walking, may no
Grudge from a distance, from the god's eye,
strike at!

For great shame were my strewment-spoiling—
riches

Spoiling with feet, and silver-purchased textures! 955
Of these things, thus then. But this female-
stranger

Tenderly take inside! Who conquers mildly
God, from afar, benignantly regardeth.

For, willing, no one wears a yoke that 's servile:
And she, of many valuables, outpicked 960
The flower, the army's gift, myself has followed.
So,—since to hear thee, I am brought about thus,—
I go into the palace—purples treading.

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

There is the sea—and what man shall exhaust it?—
Feeding much purple's worth-its-weight-in-silver 965
Dye, ever fresh and fresh, our garments' tincture ;
At home, such wealth, king, we begin—by gods'
help—

With having, and to lack, the household knows not.
Of many garments had I vowed a treading
(In oracles if fore-enjoined the household) 970
Of this dear soul the safe-return-price scheming !
For, root existing, foliage goes up houses,
O'erspreading shadow against Seirios dog-star ;
And, thou returning to the hearth domestic,
Warmth, yea, in winter dost thou show returning. 975
And when, too, Zeus works, from the green-grape
acid,
Wine—then, already, cool in houses cometh—
The perfect man his home perambulating !
Zeus, Zeus Perfecter, these my prayers perfect thou !
Thy care be—yea—of things thou mayst make
perfect ! 980

CHOROS

Wherefore to me, this fear—
Groundedly stationed here ·
Fronting my heart, the portent-watcher—flits she ?
Wherefore should prophet-play
The uncalled and unpaid lay, 985
Nor—having spat forth fear, like bad dreams—
sits she
On the mind's throne beloved—well-suasive
Boldness ?
For time, since, by a throw of all the hands,
The boat's stern-cables touched the sands,
Has past from youth to oldness,— 990
When under Ilion rushed the ship-borne bands.

AGAMEMNON

And from my eyes I learn—
Being myself my witness—their return.
Yet, all the same, without a lyre, my soul,
Itself its teacher too, chants from within 995
Erinus' dirge, not having now the whole
Of Hope's dear boldness : nor my inwards sin—
The heart that 's rolled in whirls against the
mind
Justly presageful of a fate behind.
But I pray—things false, from my hope, may fall 1000
Into the fate that 's not-fulfilled-at-all !

Especially at least, of health that 's great
The term 's insatiable : for, its weight
—A neighbour, with a common wall between—
Ever will sickness lean ; 1005
And destiny, her course pursuing straight,
Has struck man's ship against a reef unseen.
Now, when a portion, rather than the treasure,
Fear casts from sling, with peril in right measure,
It has not sunk—the universal freight, 1010
(With misery freighted over-full)
Nor has fear whelmed the hull.
Then too the gift of Zeus,
Two-handedly profuse,
Even from the furrows' yield for yearly use 1015
Has done away with famine, the disease ;
But blood of man to earth once falling—deadly,
black—
In times ere these,—
Who may, by singing spells, call back ?
Zeus had not else stopped one who rightly knew 1020
The way to bring the dead again.
But, did not an appointed Fate constrain
The Fate from gods, to bear no more than due,
My heart, outstripping what tongue utters,

AGAMEMNON

Would have all out : which now, in darkness,
mutters 1025
Moodily grieved, nor ever hopes to find
How she a word in season may unwind
From out the enkindling mind.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Take thyself in, thou too—I say, Cassandra !
Since Zeus—not angrily—in household placed thee 1030
Partaker of hand-sprinklings, with the many
Slaves stationed, his the Owner's altar close to.
Descend from out this car, nor be high-minded !
And truly they do say Alkmené's child once
Bore being sold, slaves' barley-bread his living. 1035
If, then, necessity of this lot o'erbalance,
Much is the favour of old-wealthy masters :
For those who, never hoping, made fine harvest
Are harsh to slaves in all things, beyond measure.
Thou hast—with us—such usage as law warrants. 1040

CHOROS

To thee it was, she paused plain speech from
speaking.
Being inside the fatal nets—obeying,
Thou mayst obey : but thou mayst disobey too !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Why, if she is not, in the swallow's fashion,
Possessed of voice that 's unknown and barbaric, 1045
I, with speech—speaking in mind's scope—per-
suade her.

CHOROS

Follow ! The best—as things now stand—she
speaks of.
Obey thou, leaving this thy car-enthronement !

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Well, with this thing at door, for me no leisure
To waste time: as concern the hearth mid-navelled, 1050
Already stand the sheep for fireside slaying
By those who never hoped to have such favour.
If thou, then, aught of this wilt do, delay not!
But if thou, being witless, tak'st no word in,
Speak thou, instead of voice, with hand as Kars do! 1055

CHOROS

She seems a plain interpreter in need of,
The stranger! and her way—a beast's new-
captured!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Why, she is mad, sure,—hears her own bad
senses,—
Who, while she comes, leaving a town new-
captured,
Yet knows not how to bear the bit o' the bridle 1060
Before she has out-frothed her bloody fierceness.
Not I—throwing away more words—will shamed
be!

CHOROS

But I,—for I compassionate,—will chafe not.
Come, O unhappy one, this car vacating,
Yielding to this necessity, prove yoke's use! 1065

KASSANDRA

Otototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS

Why didst thou "ototoi" concerning Loxias?
Since he is none such as to suit a mourner.

AGAMEMNON

KASSANDRA

Otototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon !

1070

CHOROS

Ill-boding here again the god invokes she
—Nowise empowered in woes to stand by helpful.

KASSANDRA

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer !
For thou hast quite, this second time, destroyed me.

1075

CHOROS

To prophesy she seems of her own evils :
Remains the god-gift to the slave-soul present.

KASSANDRA

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer !
Ha, whither hast thou led me ? to what roof now ?

1080

CHOROS

To the Atreidai's roof : if this thou know'st not,
I tell it thee, nor this wilt thou call falsehood.

KASSANDRA

How ! How !
God-hated, then ! Of many a crime it knew—
Self-slaying evils, halts too :
Man's-shambles, blood-besprinkler of the ground !

1085

CHOROS

She seems to be good-nosed, the stranger : dog-
like,
She snuffs indeed the victims she will find there.

AGAMEMNON

KASSANDRA

How ! How ! 1090
By the witnesses here I am certain now !
These children bewailing their slaughters—flesh
 dressed in the fire
And devoured by their sire !

CHOROS

Ay, we have heard of thy soothsaying glory,
Doubtless : but prophets none are we in scent of ! 1095

KASSANDRA

Ah, gods, what ever does she meditate ?
What this new anguish great ?
Great in the house here she meditates ill
Such as friends cannot bear, cannot cure it : and
 still
Off stands all Resistance 1100
Afar in the distance !

CHOROS

Of these I witless am—these prophesyings.
But those I knew : for the whole city bruits them.

KASSANDRA

Ah, unhappy one, this thou consummatest ?
Thy husband, thy bed's common guest, 1105
In the bath having brightened . . . How shall I
 declare
Consummation ? It soon will be there :
For hand after hand she outstretches,
At life as she reaches !

CHOROS

Nor yet I 've gone with thee ! for—after riddles— 1110
Now, in blind oracles, I feel resourceless.

AGAMEMNON

KASSANDRA

Eh, eh, papai, papai,
What this, I espy?
Some net of Haides undoubtedly !
Nay, rather, the snare 1115
Is she who has share
In his bed, who takes part in the murder there !
But may a revolt—
Unceasing assault—
On the Race, raise a shout 1120
Sacrificial, about
A victim—by stoning—
For murder atoning !

CHOROS

What this Erinus which i' the house thou callest
To raise her cry? Not me thy word enlightens ! 1125
To my heart has run
A drop of the crocus-dye :
Which makes for, those
On earth by the spear that lie,
A common close 1130
With life's descending sun.
Swift is the curse begun !

KASSANDRA

How ! How !
See—see quick !
Keep the bull from the cow ! 1135
In the vesture she catching him, strikes him
now
With the black-horned trick,
And he falls in the watery vase !
Of the craft-killing cauldron I tell thee the
case !

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

I would not boast to be a topping critic 1140
Of oracles : but to some sort of evil
I liken these. From oracles, what good speech
To mortals, beside, is sent ?
It comes of their evils : these arts word-abounding
that sing the event
Bring the fear 't is their office to teach. 1145

KASSANDRA

Ah me, ah me—
Of me unhappy, evil-destined fortunes !
For I bewail my proper woe
As, mine with his, all into one I throw.
Why hast thou hither me unhappy brought ? 1150
—Unless that I should die with him—for nought !
What else was sought ?

CHOROS

Thou art some mind-mazed creature, god-pos-
sessed :
And all about thyself dost wail
A lay—no lay ! 1155
Like some brown nightingale
Insatiable of noise, who—well-away !—
From her unhappy breast
Keeps moaning Itus, Itus, and his life
With evils, flourishing on each side, rife. 1160

KASSANDRA

Ah me, ah me,
The fate o' the nightingale, the clear resounder !
For a body wing-borne have the gods cast round
her,
And sweet existence, from misfortunes free :

AGAMEMNON

But for myself remains a sundering
With spear, the two-edged thing ! 1165

CHOROS

Whence hast thou this on-rushing god-involving
 pain
And spasms in vain ?
For, things that terrify,
With changing unintelligible cry 1170
Thou strikest up in tune, yet all the while
After that Orthian style !
Whence hast thou limits to the oracular road,
That evils bode ?

KASSANDRA

Ah me, the nuptials, the nuptials of Paris, the deadly
 to friends ! 1175
Ah me, of Skamandros the draught
Paternal ! There once, to these ends,
On thy banks was I brought,
The unhappy ! And now, by Kokutos and
 Acheron's shore
I shall soon be, it seems, these my oracles singing
 once more ! 1180

CHOROS

Why this word, plain too much,
Hast thou uttered ? A babe might learn of such !
I am struck with a bloody bite—here under—
At the fate woe-wreaking
Of thee shrill shrieking : 1185
To me who hear—a wonder !

KASSANDRA

Ah me, the toils—the toils of the city
The wholly destroyed : ah, pity,

AGAMEMNON

Of the sacrificings my father made
In the ramparts' aid—
Much slaughter of grass-fed flocks—that afforded¹¹⁹⁰
no cure
That the city should not, as it does now, the
burthen endure!
But I, with the soul on fire,
Soon to the earth shall cast me and expire.

CHOROS

To things, on the former consequent,¹¹⁹⁵
Again hast thou given vent :
And 't is some evil-meaning fiend doth move
thee,
Heavily falling from above thee,
To melodize thy sorrows—else, in singing,
Calamitous, death-bringing!¹²⁰⁰
And of all this the end
I am without resource to apprehend.

KASSANDRA .

Well then, the oracle from veils no longer .
Shall be outlooking, like a bride new-married :
But bright it seems, against the sun's uprisings¹²⁰⁵
Breathing, to penetrate thee : so as, wave-like,
To wash against the rays a woe much greater
Than this. I will no longer teach by riddles.
And witness, running with me, that of evils
Done long ago, I nosing track the footstep!¹²¹⁰
For, this same roof here—never quits a Choros
One-voiced, not well-tuned since no "well" it
utters :
And truly having drunk, to get more courage,
Man's blood—the Komos keeps within the house-
hold
—Hard to be sent outside—of sister Furies :¹²¹⁵

AGAMEMNON

They hymn their hymn—within the house close sitting—

The first beginning curse : in turn spit forth at
The Brother's bed, to him who spurned it hostile.
Have I missed aught, or hit I like a bowman ?
False prophet am I,—knock at doors, a babbler ? 1220
Henceforward witness, swearing now, I know not
By other's word the old sins of this household !

CHOROS

And how should oath, bond honourably binding,
Become thy cure ? No less I wonder at thee
—That thou, beyond sea reared, a strange-tongued
city
Shouldst hit in speaking, just as if thou stood'st 1225
by !

KASSANDRA

Prophet Apollon put me in this office.

CHOROS

What, even though a god, with longing smitten ?

KASSANDRA

At first, indeed, shame was to me to say this.

CHOROS

For, more relaxed grows everyone who fares well. 1230

KASSANDRA

But he was athlete to me—huge grace breathing !

CHOROS

Well, to the work of children, went ye law's way ?

KASSANDRA

Having consented, I played false to Loxias.

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

Already when the wits inspired possessed of?

KASSANDRA

Already townsmen all their woes I foretold.

1235

CHOROS

How wast thou then unhurt by Loxias' anger?

KASSANDRA

I no one aught persuaded, when I sinned thus.

CHOROS

To us, at least, now sooth to say thou seemest.

KASSANDRA

Halloo, halloo, ah, evils!

Again, straightforward foresight's fearful labour

1240

Whirls me, distracting with prelusive last-lays!

Behold ye those there, in the household seated,—

Youngones,—of dreams approaching to the figures?

Children, as if they died by their beloveds—

Hands they have filled with flesh, the meal
domestic—

1245

Entrails and vitals both, most piteous burthen,

Plain they are holding!—which their father tasted!

For this, I say, plans punishment a certain

Lion ignoble, on the bed that wallows,

House-guard (ah, me!) to the returning master

1250

—Mine, since to bear the slavish yoke behoves me!

The ship's commander, Ilion's desolator,

Knows not what things the tongue of the lewd
she-dog

Speaking, outspreading, shiny-souled, in fashion

Of Até hid, will reach to, by ill fortune!

1255

AGAMEMNON

Such things she dares—the female, the male's
slayer!

She is . . . how calling her the hateful bite-beast
May I hit the mark? Some amphibaina,—Skulla
Housing in rocks, of mariners the mischief,
Revelling Haides' mother,—curse, no truce with, 1260
Breathing at friends! How piously she shouted,
The all-courageous, as at turn of battle!
She seems to joy at the back-bringing safety!
Of this, too, if I nought persuade, all 's one!
Why?

What is to be will come. And soon thou, present, 1265
“True prophet all too much” wilt pitying style me.

CHOROS

Thuestes' feast, indeed, on flesh of children,
I went with, and I shuddered. Fear too holds me
Listing what 's true as life, nowise out-imaged.

KASSANDRA

I say, thou Agamemnon's fate shalt look on. 1270

CHOROS

Speak good words, O unhappy! Set mouth
sleeping!

KASSANDRA

But Paian stands in no stead to the speech here.

CHOROS

Nay, if the thing be near: but never be it!

KASSANDRA

Thou, indeed, prayest: they to kill are busy.

CHOROS

Of what man is it ministered, this sorrow? 1275

AGAMEMNON

KASSANDRA

There again, wide thou look'st of my foretellings.

CHOROS

For, the fulfiller's scheme I have not gone with.

KASSANDRA

And yet too well I know the speech Hellenic.

CHOROS

For Puthian oracles, thy speech, and hard too.

KASSANDRA

Papai : what fire this ! and it comes upon me ! 1280

Ototoi, Lukeion Apollon, ah me—me !

She, the two-footed lioness that sleeps with

The wolf, in absence of the generous lion,

Kills me the unhappy one : and as a poison

Brewing, to put my price too in the anger, 1285

She vows, against her mate this weapon whetting

To pay him back the bringing me, with slaughter.

Why keep I then these things to make me laughed
at,

Both wands and, round my neck, oracular fillets ?

Thee, at least, ere my own fate will I ruin : 1290

Go, to perdition falling ! Boons exchange we—

Some other Até in my stead make wealthy !

See there—himself, Apollon stripping from me

The oracular garment ! having looked upon me

—Even in these adornments, laughed by friends at, 1295

As good as foes, i' the balance weighed : and

vainly—

For, called crazed stroller,—as I had been gipsy,

Beggar, unhappy, starved to death,—I bore it.

And now the Prophet—prophet me undoing,

AGAMEMNON

Has led away to these so deadly fortunes ! 1300
Instead of my sire's altar, waits the hack-block
She struck with first warm bloody sacrificing !
Yet nowise unavenged of gods will death be :
For there shall come another, our avenger,
The mother-slaying scion, father's doomsman : 1305
Fugitive, wanderer, from this land an exile,
Back shall he come,—for friends, copestone these
curses

For there is sworn a great oath from the gods that
Him shall bring hither his fallen sire's prostration.
Why make I then, like an indweller, moaning ? 1310
Since at the first I foresaw Ilion's city
Suffering as it has suffered : and who took it,
Thus by the judgment of the gods are faring.
I go, will suffer, will submit to dying !
But, Haides' gates—these same I call, I speak to, 1315
And pray that on an opportune blow chancing,
Without a struggle,—blood the calm death bringing
In easy outflow,—I this eye may close up !

CHOROS

O much unhappy, but, again, much learned
Woman, long hast thou outstretched ! But if truly 1320
Thou knowest thine own fate, how comest that, like to
A god-led steer, to altar bold thou treadest ?

KASSANDRA

There 's no avoidance,—strangers, no ! Some time
more !

CHOROS

He last is, anyhow, by time advantaged.

KASSANDRA

It comes, the day : I shall by flight gain little. 1325

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

But know thou patient art from thy brave spirit !

KASSANDRA

Such things hears no one of the happy-fortuned.

CHOROS

But gloriously to die—for man is grace, sure.

KASSANDRA

Ah, sire, for thee and for thy noble children !

CHOROS

But what thing is it ? What fear turns thee back-
wards ?

1330

KASSANDRA

Alas, alas !

CHOROS

Why this “ Alas ! ” if ’t is no spirit’s loathing ?

KASSANDRA

Slaughter blood-dripping does the household
smell of !

CHOROS

How else ? This scent is of hearth-sacrifices.

KASSANDRA

Such kind of steam as from a tomb is proper !

1335

CHOROS

No Surian honour to the House thou speak’st of !

KASSANDRA

But I will go,—even in the household wailing
My fate and Agamemnon’s. Life suffice me !

AGAMEMNON

Ah, strangers !

I cry not "ah"—as bird at bush—through terror 1340
Idly ! to me, the dead, this much bear witness :
When, for me—woman, there shall die a woman,
And, for a man ill-wived, a man shall perish !
This hospitality I ask as dying.

CHOROS

O sufferer, thee—thy foretold fate I pity. 1345

KASSANDRA

Yet once for all, to speak a speech, I fain am :
No dirge, mine for myself ! The sun I pray to,
Fronting his last light !—to my own avengers—
That from my hateful slayers they exact too
Pay for the dead slave—easy-managed hand's work ! 1350

CHOROS

Alas for mortal matters ! Happy-fortuned,—
Why, any shade would turn them : if unhappy,
By throws the wetting sponge has spoiled the
picture !
And more by much in mortals this I pity.
The being well-to-do— 1355
Insatiate a desire of this
Born with all mortals is,
Nor any is there who
Well-being forces off, aoints
From roofs whereat a finger points, 1360
"No more come in !" exclaiming. This man, too,
To take the city of Priamos did the celestials give,
And, honoured by the god, he homeward comes ;
But now if, of the former, he shall pay
The blood back, and, for those who ceased to live, 1365
Dying, for deaths in turn new punishment he
dooms—

AGAMEMNON

Who, being mortal, would not pray
With an unmischievous
Daimon to have been born—who would not,
hearing thus?

AGAMEMNON

Ah me ! I am struck—a right-aimed stroke within
me !

1370

CHOROS

Silence ! Who is it shouts “stroke”—“right-
aimedly” a wounded one ?

AGAMEMNON

Ah me ! indeed again,—a second, struck by !

CHOROS

This work seems to me completed by this “Ah,
me” of the king’s ;
But we somehow may together share in solid
counsellings.

CHOROS 1

I, in the first place, my opinion tell you :
—To cite the townsmen, by help-cry, to house here.

1375

CHOROS 2

To me, it seems we ought to fall upon them
Atquickest—prove the fact by sword fresh-flowing !

CHOROS 3

And I, of such opinion the partaker,
Vote—to do something : not to wait—the main
point !

1380

CHOROS 4

’T is plain to see ; for they prelude as though of
A tyranny the signs they gave the city.

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS 5

For we waste time; while they,—this waiting's glory
Treading to ground,—allow the hand no slumber.

CHOROS 6

I know not—chancing on some plan—to tell it : 1385
'T is for the doer to plan of the deed also.

CHOROS 7

And I am such another : since I 'm schemeless
How to raise up again by words—a dead man !

CHOROS 8

What, and, protracting life, shall we give way thus
To the disgracers of our home, these rulers ? 1390

CHOROS 9

Why, 't is unbearable : but to die is better :
For death than tyranny is the riper finish !

CHOROS 10

What, by the testifying “ Ah me ” of him,
Shall we prognosticate the man as perished ?

CHOROS 11

We must quite know ere speak these things concerning : 1395
For to conjecture and “ quite know ” are two things.

CHOROS 12

This same to praise I from all sides abound in—
Clearly to know—Atreides, what he 's doing !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Much having been before to purpose spoken,
The opposite to say I shall not shamed be : 1400

AGAMEMNON

For how should one, to enemies,—in semblance,
Friends,—enmity proposing,—sorrow's net-frame
Enclose, a height superior to outleaping?
To me, indeed, this struggle of old—not mindless
Of an old victory—came : with time, I grant you ! 1405
I stand where I have struck, things once accom-
plished :

And so have done,—and this deny I shall not,—
As that his fate was nor to fly nor ward off.
A wrap-round with no outlet, as for fishes,
I fence about him—the rich woe of the garment : 1410
I strike him twice, and in a double “Ah-me !”
He let his limbs go—*there* ! And to him, fallen,
The third blow add I, giving—of Below-ground
Zeus, guardian of the dead—the votive favour.
Thus in the mind of him he rages, falling, 1415
And blowing forth a brisk blood-spatter, strikes me
With the dark drop of slaughterous dew—rejoicing
No less than, at the god-given dewy-comfort,
The sown-stuff in its birth-throes from the calyx.
Since so these things are,—Argives, my revered
here,— 1420

Ye may rejoice—if ye rejoice : but I—boast ?
If it were fit on corpse to pour libation,
That would be right—right over and above, too !
The cup of evils in the house he, having
Filled with such curses, himself coming drinks of. 1425

CHOROS

We wonder at thy tongue : since bold-mouthed
truly
Is she who in such speech boasts o'er her husband !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Ye test me as I were a witless woman :
But I—with heart intrepid—to you knowers

AGAMEMNON

Say (and thou—if thou wilt or praise or blame
me, 1430
Comes to the same)—this man is Agamemnon,
My husband, dead, the work of the right hand
here,
Ay, of a just artificer : so things are.

CHOROS

What evil, O woman, food or drink, earth-bred
Or sent from the flowing sea, 1435
Of such having fed
Didst thou set on thee
This sacrifice
And popular cries
Of a curse on thy head ? 1440
Off thou hast thrown him, off hast cut
The man from the city : but—
Off from the city thyself shalt be
Cut—to the citizens
A hate immense ! 1445

'KLUTAIMNESTRA

Now, indeed, thou adjudgest exile to me,
And citizens' hate, and to have popular curses :
Nothing of this against the man here bringing,
Who, no more awe-checked than as 't were a
beast's fate,—
With sheep abundant in the well-fleeced graze-
flocks,— 1450
Sacrificed *his* child,—dearest fruit of travail
To me,—as song-spell against Threkian blowings.
Not *him* did it behove thee hence to banish
—Pollution's penalty ? But hearing *my* deeds
Justicer rough thou art ! Now, this I tell thee : 1455
To threaten thus—me, one prepared to have thee
(On like conditions, thy hand conquering) o'er me

AGAMEMNON

Rule : but if God the opposite ordain us,
Thou shalt learn—late taught, certes—to be
modest.

CHOROS

Greatly-intending thou art : 1460
Much-mindful, too, hast thou cried
(Since thy mind, with its slaughter-outpouring
part,
Is frantic) that over the eyes, a patch
Of blood—with blood to match—
Is plain for a pride ! 1465
Yet still, bereft of friends, thy fate
Is—blow with blow to expiate !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

And this thou hearest—of my oaths, just war-
rant !
By who fulfilled things for my daughter, Justice,
Até, Erinus,—by whose help I slew him,— 1470
Not mine the fancy—Fear will tread my palace
So long as on my hearth there burns a fire,
Aigisthos as before well-caring for me ;
Since he to me is shield, no small, of boldness.
Here does he lie—outrager of this female, 1475
Dainty of all the Chruseids under Ilion ;
And she—the captive, the soothsayer also
And couchmate of this man, oracle-speaker,
Faithful bed-fellow,—ay, the sailors' benches
They wore in common, nor unpunished did so, 1480
Since he is—thus ! While, as for her,—swan-
fashion,
Her latest having chanted,—dying wailing
She lies,—to him, a sweetheart : me she brought
to—
My bed's by-nicety—the whet of dalliance.

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

Alas, that some 1485
Fate would come
Upon us in quickness—
Neither much sickness
Neither bed-keeping—
And bear unended sleeping, 1490
Now that subdued
Is our keeper, the kindest of mood !
Having borne, for a woman's sake, much strife—
By a woman he withered from life !
Ah me ! 1495
Law-breaking Helena who, one,
Hast many, so many souls undone
'Neath Troia ! and now the consummated
Much-memorable curse
Hast thou made flower-forth, red 1500
With the blood no rains disperse,
That which was then in the House—
Strife all-subduing, the woe of a spouse.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Nowise, of death the fate—
Burdened by these things—supplicate ! 1505
Nor on Helena turn thy wrath
As the man-destroyer, as "she who hath,
Being but one,
Many and many a soul undone
Of the men, the Danaoi"— 1510
And wrought immense annoy !

CHOROS

Daimon, who fallest
Upon this household and the double-raced
Tantalidai, a rule, minded like theirs displaced,

AGAMEMNON

Thou rulest me with, now, 1515
Whose heart thou gallest !
And on the body, like a hateful crow,
Stationed, all out of tune, his chant to chant
Doth Something vaunt !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Now, of a truth, hast thou set upright 1520
Thy mouth's opinion,—
Naming the Sprite,
The triply gross,
O'er the race that has dominion :
For through him it is that Eros 1525
The carnage-licker
In the belly is bred : ere ended quite
Is the elder throe—new ichor !

CHOROS

Certainly, great of might
And heavy of wrath, the Sprite 1530
Thou tellest of, in the palace
(Woe, woe !)
—An evil tale of a fate
By Até's malice
Rendered insatiate ! 1535
Oh, oh,—
King, king, how shall I bewEEP thee ?
From friendly soul whatever say ?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep
thee
In impious death, life breathing away. 1540
O me—me !
This couch, not free !
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Thou boastest this deed to be mine : 1545
But leave off styling me
"The Agamemnonian wife!"
For, showing himself in sign
Of the spouse of the corpse thou dost see,
Did the ancient bitter avenging-ghost 1550
Of Atreus, savage host,
Pay the man here as price—
A full-grown for the young one's sacrifice.

CHOROS

That no cause, indeed, of this killing art thou,
Who shall be witness-bearer? 1555
How shall he bear it—how?
But the sire's avenging-ghost might be in the
deed a sharer.
He is forced on and on
By the kin-born flowing of blood,
—Black Ares :, to where, having gone, 1560
He shall leave off, flowing done,
At the frozen-child's-flesh food.
King, king, how shall I bewEEP thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep thee 1565
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free!
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart. 1570

KLUTAIMNESTRA

No death "unfit for the free"
Do I think this man's to be :
For did not himself a slavish curse

AGAMEMNON

To his household decree?
 But the scion of him, myself did nurse— 1575
 That much-bewailed Iphigeneia, he
 Having done well by,—and as well, nor worse,
 Been done to,—let him not in Haides loudly
 Bear himself proudly!
 Being by sword-destroying death amerced 1580
 For that sword's punishment himself inflicted
 first.

CHOROS

I at a loss am left—
 Of a feasible scheme of mind bereft—
 Where I may turn : for the house is falling :
 I fear the bloody crash of the rain 1585
 That ruins the roof as it bursts amain :
 The warning-drop
 Has come to a stop.
 Destiny doth Justice whet
 For other deed of hurt, on other whetstones
 yet. 1590
 Woe, earth, earth—would thou hadst taken *me*
 Ere I saw the man I see,
 On the pallet-bed
 Of the silver-sided bath-vase, dead !
 Who is it shall bury him, who 1595
 Sing his dirge ? Can it be true
 That *thou* wilt dare this same to do—
 Having slain thy husband, thine own,
 To make his funeral moan :
 And for the soul of him, in place 1600
 Of his mighty deeds, a graceless grace
 To wickedly institute ? By whom
 Shall the tale of praise o'er the tomb
 At the god-like man be sent—
 From the truth of his mind as he toils intent ? 1605

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

It belongs not to thee to declare
This object of care !
By us did he fall—down there !
Did he die—down there ! and down, no less,
We will bury him there, and not beneath 1610
The wails of the household over his death :
But Iphigeneia,—with kindness,—
His daughter,—as the case requires,
Facing him full, at the rapid-flowing
Passage of Groans shall—both hands throwing 1615
Around him—kiss that kindest of sires !

CHOROS

This blame comes in the place of blame :
Hard battle it is to judge each claim.
“ He is borne away who bears away :
And the killer has all to pay.” 1620
And this remains while Zeus is remaining,
“ The doer shall suffer in time ”—for, such his
ordaining.
Who may cast out of the House its cursed brood ?
The race is to Até glued !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Thou hast gone into this oracle 1625
With a true result. For me, then,—I will
—To the Daimon of the Pleisthenidai
Making an oath—with all these things comply
Hard as they are to bear. For the rest—
Going from out this House, a guest, 1630
May he wear some other family
To nought, with the deaths of kin by kin !
And,—keeping a little part of my goods,—
Wholly am I contented in

AGAMEMNON

Having expelled from the royal House 1635
These frenzied moods
The mutually-murderous.

AIGISTHOS

O light propitious of day justice-bringing !
I may say truly, now, that men's avengers,
The gods from high, of earth behold the sorrows— 1640
Seeing, as I have, i' the spun robes of the Erinues,
This man here lying,—sight to me how pleasant!—
His father's hands' contrivances repaying.
For Atreus, this land's lord, of this man father,
Thuestes, my own father—to speak clearly— 1645
His brother too,—being i' the rule contested,—
Drove forth to exile from both town and house-
hold :
And, coming back, to the hearth turned, a sup-
pliant,
Wretched Thuestes found the fate assured him
—Not to die, bloodying his paternal threshold 1650
Just there : but host-wise this man's impious
father
Atreus, soul-keenly more than kindly,—seeming •
To joyous hold a flesh-day,—to my father
Served up a meal, the flesh of his own children.
The feet indeed and the hands' top divisions 1655
He hid, high up and isolated sitting :
But, their unshowing parts in ignorance taking,
He forthwith eats food—as thou seest—perdi-
tion
To the race : and then, 'ware of the deed ill-
omened,
He shrieked O !—falls back, vomiting, from the
carnage, 1660
And fate on the Pelopidai past bearing
He prays down—putting in his curse together

AGAMEMNON

The kicking down o' the feast—that so might
perish

The race of Pleisthenes entire : and thence is
That it is given thee to see this man prostrate. 1665
And I was rightly of this slaughter stitch-man :
Since me,—being third from ten,—with my poor
father

He drives out—being then a babe in swathe-bands:
But, grown up, back again has justice brought
me :

And of this man I got hold—being without-
doors— 1670

Fitting together the whole scheme of ill-will.
So, sweet, in fine, even to die were to me,
Seeing, as I have, this man i' the toils of justice !

CHOROS

•Aigisthos, arrogance in ills I love not.
Dost thou say—willing, thou didst kill the man
here, 1675
And, alone, plot this lamentable slaughter ?
I say—thy head in justice will escape not
The people's throwing—know that !—stones and
curses !

AIGISTHOS

Thou such things soundest—seated at the lower
Oarage to those who rule at the ship's mid-
bench ? 1680

Thou shalt know, being old, how heavy is teach-
ing

To one of the like age—bidden be modest !
But chains and old age and the pangs of fasting
Stand out before all else in teaching,—prophets
At souls'-cure ! Dost not, seeing aught, see this
too ? 1685

Against goads kick not, lest tript-up thou suffer !

AGAMEMNON

CHOROS

Woman, thou,—of him coming new from battle
Houseguard—thy husband's bed the while disgracing,—
For the Army-leader didst thou plan this fate too ?

AIGISTHOS

These words too are of groans the prime-begetters ! 1690
Truly a tongue opposed to Orpheus hast thou :
For he led all things by his voice's grace-charm,
But thou, upstirring them by these wild yelpings,
Wilt lead them ! Forced, thou wilt appear the
tamer !

CHOROS

So—thou shalt be my king then of the Argeians— 1695
Who, not when for this man his fate thou plannedst,
Daredst to do this deed—thyself the slayer !

AIGISTHOS

For, to deceive him was the wife's part, certes :
I was looked after—foe, ay, old-begotten !
But out of this man's wealth will I endeavour • 1700
To rule the citizens : and the no-man-minder
—Him will I heavily yoke—by no means trace-
horse,
A corned-up colt ! but that bad friend in dark-
ness,
Famine its housemate, shall behold him gentle.

CHOROS

Why then, this man here, from a coward spirit, 1705
Didst not thou slay thyself ? But,—helped,—a
woman,
The country's pest, and that of gods o' the
country,

AGAMEMNON

Killed him! Orestes, where may he see light
now?
That coming hither back, with gracious fortune,
Of both these he may be the all-conquering slayer? 1710

AIGISTHOS

But since this to do thou thinkest—and not talk
—thou soon shalt know!
Up then, comrades dear! the proper thing to do
—not distant this!

CHOROS

Up then! hilt in hold, his sword let everyone aright
dispose!

AIGISTHOS

Ay, but I myself too, hilt in hold, do not refuse to
die.

CHOROS

Thou wilt die, thou say'st, to who accept it. We
the chance demand. 1715

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Nowise, O belovedest of men, may we do other ills!
To have reaped away these, even, is a harvest
much to me.
Go, both thou and these the old men, to the homes
appointed each,
Ere ye suffer! It behoved one do these things
just as we did:
And if of these troubles there should be enough—
we may assent 1720
—By the Daimon's heavy heel unfortunately
stricken ones!
So a woman's counsel hath it—if one judge it
learning-worth.

AGAMEMNON

AIGISTHOS

But to think that these at me the idle tongue
should thus o'erbloom,
And throw out such words—the Daimon's power
experimenting on—
And, of modest knowledge missing,—me, the
ruler, . . .

172

CHOROS

Ne'er may this befall Argeians—wicked man to
fawn before!

AIGISTHOS

Anyhow, in after days, will I, yes, I, be at thee yet!

CHOROS

Not if hither should the Daimon make Orestes
straightway come!

AIGISTHOS

O, I know, myself, that fugitives on hopes, are
pasture-fed!

CHOROS

Do thy deed, get fat, defiling justice, since the
power is thine!

173

AIGISTHOS

Know that thou shalt give me satisfaction for this
folly's sake!

CHOROS

Boast on, bearing thee audacious, like a cock his
females by!

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Have not thou respect for these same idle yelp-
ings ! I and thou
Will arrange it, o'er this household ruling ex-
cellently well.

END OF VOL. VIII